

THE PRINCE OF NEW YORK DETECTIVES!

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BY WILLIAM G. PATTEN.

FIRE-EYE, THE THUGS' TERROR; Or, COCKNEY BOB'S BIG BLUFF.



WITH A QUICK MOTION, THE DETECTIVE REMOVED THE FALSE BEARD, AND STOOD BEFORE THEM THE PERFECT COUNTERPART OF CLINCHER MIKE.

Fire-Eye, the Thugs' Terror;

OR,

COCKNEY BOB'S BIG BLUFF.

BY WILLIAM G. PATTEN,

AUTHOR OF "DOUBLE-VOICE DAN" STORIES,
"THE PRINCE OF NEW YORK CROOKS,"
"OLD NIGHT HAWK," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE FEAR OF THE STRANGLERS.

"MR. BRUCE," said Superintendent Byrnes, "I have some work for you."

"Very well, sir; I am ready."

"You are always ready."

"Thank you. What is the case?"

"I don't know as it can be exactly called a 'case.' Still, I scent a mystery, and there is no telling what may come of it. Do you know anything about Mr. Warren Trench, the peculiar millionaire of Thirty-sixth Street?"

"I know he is dead."

"Yes; he died very suddenly yesterday. His wife has sent for a detective."

"Ah?"

"She says she wants a man to remain in the house until the funeral to-morrow, and to accompany the corpse to the grave. She seems to fear some one contemplates injuring her husband after he is dead."

"Which is singular."

"A bit odd. There were many strange things about Warren Trench while he lived, and he remains a mystery since he died. No one knew how he acquired his money, how he lived, or any of the particulars about him."

"His friends—"

"He had no friends outside of his own house—at least, he appeared to have no friends. I have sometimes suspected—but I am not going to tell you what I have suspected. I have selected you for this matter because I know I can rely fully on your good judgment."

"Thank you, sir."

"I want you to keep your eyes open and find out anything you can. This may be of greater importance than you think at this moment."

Prince Bruce knew without further words exactly what was required of him, and he was aware a matter was pretty sure to prove important if the superintendent said it might be. Although he could not determine the character of the chief's suspicions concerning Mr. Warren Trench, he felt sure the dead man had not been regarded favorably.

Five minutes after this conversation took place Bruce was on his way toward the home of the dead millionaire.

This detective, who had the full confidence of Thomas Byrnes, was a remarkable man, having a reputation second to none on the regular force, and often being allowed by his superior to use his own judgment and employ his own methods to an extent that was simply astonishing.

In repose, the face of Prince Bruce was rather dead and almost stupid-looking, while his eyes had a sleepy droop. There was none of that sharp appearance and briskness common to many famous detectives.

But, when he was aroused—well, he simply became another man! Enrage him and his face grew terrible to look upon and his eyes glowed like those of a tiger when reflecting the light of a night camp-fire. They seemed to positively burn, for which reason he was commonly known as Fire-Eye.

Fire-Eye was a terror to the crooks of New York, and they dreaded him more than a combination of any other twenty police forces.

He was said to be invulnerable, and many of the gang had plotted to kill him, but always made a pitiful failure of it.

Some of the crooks declared they had fired straight at his heart at a distance of less than five paces and he had minded the bullets not in the least.

These yarns, however, were generally accepted as inventions of persons who possessed a fanciful imagination or were not remarkably good shots.

Still Fire-Eye was a terror.

Straight to the house of the dead millionaire he betook himself, and his ring brought a strange dark-faced servant to the door.

"I wish to see Mrs. Trench," said the detective, as the servant eyed him searchingly.

"Business?" was the curt question.

"I am a detective."

"Sent for?"

"Yes."

"Come in."

He was ushered into a luxuriously-furnished room, and the dark-faced servant took away his card.

"Well," thought Fire-Eye, "it is certainly a peculiar-looking personage at the door. Strikes me like a Malay. Certainly he is not a common mulatto. I believe I can smell mystery now. I feel that I am going to get track of something remarkable."

It was at least ten minutes before any one appeared, and Fire-Eye put in his time at examining the general aspect of the darkened room where he was seated.

Finally, he heard a rustle of skirts; then the portieres parted to admit a tall, handsome woman, who was attired in black and seemed to have been weeping.

Prince arose and bowed.

"Mrs. Trench?"

"I am, sir. And you are the detective I sent for?"

"Yes, madam; I was detached to attend to the matter."

"I am glad you have arrived, for I am very nervous."

"Naturally, madam."

"I have a cause other than the death of my poor husband."

"Ah?"

"Yes. I know not exactly how to explain it so you will understand. I—I—"

She hesitated, and he could see her bosom heaving turbulently. He took the occasion to survey her as closely as the dim light of the room would allow.

She was apparently about thirty years of age, although she might have been younger, and a remarkably striking-looking woman she was. Her carriage was that of a queen, and her figure was evidently cast in a mold little short of perfect. Her features were regular and finely-chiseled, although a trifle on the sensual order, as if she were a person of strong passions, either for love or hatred. Her lips were red and full, and her eyes large and full of luster, even though she had lately been shedding tears. A mass of raven black hair was artistically arranged upon her head.

"Here is a woman born to control men," thought Fire-Eye. "She is not of the common order. She could make a man her slave and control his mind so he would be either a saint or a sinner for her sake."

After a brief pause, she spoke again:

"It is like this: My husband was a man who had many enemies, some of whom are the most relentless and vindictive human beings imaginable. He made these enemies several years ago, and he had been guarding himself against them ever since. They feared him while he lived, but now he is dead, I fear them."

"In what way? Do you think they will attempt to harm you?"

"No."

"Then I do not quite understand—"

"I fear they will yet harm him!"

Prince started.

"Are you serious?"

"Perfectly."

"How can such a thing happen? How can they harm him? He is dead, is he not?"

"He is dead, but I told you these creatures were relentless. I fear they will mutilate his dead body!"

"Ha!"

"Now you understand me!"

"To a certain extent. You think his enemies may attempt to mistreat his corpse before it is placed in the grave?"

"That is it."

"But, they cannot reach him here."

"Ah!" she cried, throwing out both hands; "you do not know them! They attempted it last night!"

"Indeed!"

"Yes, it is true. But for faithful Ong Phal, who has remained by Mr. Trench's body every moment since my husband died,

not even closing his eyes for a minute, they would have succeeded."

"How did they enter the house?"

"Do not ask me! These men of Rajputana go anywhere—walls of stone do not seem to stop them."

"Rajputana! That sounds like an Indian name."

"It is. They come from India, in which country Mr. Trench once traveled."

"How many of them are there?"

"That I cannot tell; but they seem to multiply. If one is killed, two appear to take his place. It is useless to battle against them with anything but their own weapons. One of them entered this house last night and went to the room where my husband lies, guarded by Ong Phal."

"Ong Phal is what?"

"An Indian; he comes from Bhawalpur. Last night as he watched by the body, he heard a light step, and whirled just in time to save himself. One of our enemies was ready to cast the cord about his neck."

"The cord?"

"Yes, the cord of the Stranglers."

"Then they are Thugs?"

"Yes."

Fire-Eye whistled softly.

Thugs in New York! That was certainly interesting. He felt a thrill of satisfaction, for this was something a trifle out of the ordinary.

"Ong Phal grappled with the fellow," the woman went on, excitedly. "There was a fearful struggle, but the Thug got away and escaped from the house in some mysterious manner. I knew not what to do, but I finally decided to send for a police officer. Then I thought it would be better to have a detective come to the house and remain on hand till all is over."

"I believe you chose the best course possible. Will you take me to the room where your husband's body rests?"

"This way, sir."

As he followed the woman from the room, Fire-Eye little dreamed of the remarkable discoveries he was soon to make, or the startling adventures and terrible dangers through which he would pass before he solved the entire mystery.

CHAPTER II.

A STRANGE VISITOR.

The corpse rested in a handsome ebony coffin, a peaceful and life-like look on his rugged face.

He was apparently a man of about forty, with black hair and dark full beard.

Ong Phal hovered over the coffin, his small, beady eyes glaring at Prince Bruce as the detective entered. Ong was certainly anything but handsome, being thin and bony, with a parchment-like skin that seemed none too clean. He was dressed in strange uncivilized garments, a crimson turban being wrapped about his head. His fingers were crooked, like claws, and his yellow teeth resembled fangs.

"If I were dead, I believe I'd come to life rather than have that creature hunched over my body," thought Fire-Eye.

The woman spoke a few words to the Indian, but the detective did not understand the language used.

Ong Phal said nothing, but he still regarded Prince suspiciously.

The detective looked intently at the dead man, wondering at his natural appearance.

"He almost seems to be sleeping," were the words that came involuntarily from Fire-Eye's lips.

"That is true," quickly agreed the woman. "His appearance is most life-like."

"Of what did he die?"

"Heart failure."

"Sudden?"

"Very sudden."

"His heart has given him trouble?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long?"

"Since he was in India."

"You have a regular certificate of his death?"

"It was filled out by our physician."

"There was no autopsy?"

"It was not necessary."

"You do not think there was anything singular about his death?"

Although he seemed to be looking down at the placid face in the coffin, the ferret saw her dart a quick, startled glance at him.

"Singular, sir? In what way?"

"Oh, I don't know. I merely asked. There was no way for his enemies to reach him and poison him?"

He fancied she drew a breath of relief, as she calmly answered:

"Not the least chance in the world."

"And yet, you say one of them entered this house since his death."

"It was easier than before, as we were all overcome with grief, and we were not on the watch, scarcely thinking they would attempt to molest him after death."

"In what way did he injure these men?"

"I do not know as he ever did injure them. It is possible they fancied they had been injured by him. That was his secret, and it died with him."

It was not difficult for Prince to see she did not care to be questioned further, so he turned on Ongo Phal, asking him about the man he had seen in that room.

The old Indian simply glared at him.

"Ongo does not speak English," explained Mrs. Trench.

But the ferret fancied he was understood, although the repulsive looking creature did not deign to answer.

With each minute Fire-Eye became more and more impressed by the conviction that the house was a place of mystery.

"What is required of me?" he asked. "Do you wish me to remain in this room and constantly watch the body?"

Again the woman said something to the old Indian, who shook his head and mumbled a few words.

"No," she replied. "Ongo says he will remain here yet a while. I want you to see that no suspicious people are lingering about in the vicinity, and, in case you detect anyone, keep your eyes on them. You are welcome to go to any part of the house, as you may find it necessary. Here is a key to the front door, which will admit you, so you can go out and in as you choose. Your service will be of the greatest importance at the funeral to-morrow."

Those were all the instructions he received, and they were all he required or desired.

He immediately took a fancy to wander about and become familiar with the entire interior of the place.

Twice within an hour he peered into the room where the dead man lay, and each time his eyes were met by the beady orbs of Ongo Phal, who seemed ever tireless and watchful.

The detective had taken an immediate and strong aversion for the old Indian, for there was a repugnance about the creature's appearance that made him repulsive.

"He reminds me of a snake," muttered Prince, as he turned from the door the second time. "Talk about Thugs! That old wretch would strangle his grandmother for sport!"

In the parlor there was an alcove window, before which were hung some heavy curtains that could be drawn to close the alcove entirely. They were partially drawn, but Prince stepped into the alcove without disturbing them.

The shutters were closed, but he was able to peer through them and look to the east and west along the street, which was fully commanded by the window.

There he took up his position, watching for any one of a suspicious appearance who might be lingering near.

He had not been there more than twenty minutes before his attention was turned on a man who came slouching along the street.

This person was rather roughly dressed, having a thick neck, and a bull-dog face that gave him the appearance of a prize-fighter or ruffian in general.

He seemed to be looking for a certain number, as he paused several times and stared up at doors.

Finally, he halted in front of the house of death, and the watching detective saw a look of satisfaction overspread his villainous face, while he nodded his head, as if he had found the place he was looking for.

"An Englishman, or I'm no judge," mentally observed Prince. "The very lowest grade, too."

The man crossed the street and stood staring at the house for some time.

"Wonder what he means to do?"

The question was soon answered, for the stranger re-crossed the street, walked deliberately up the steps and rung the bell.

"Two to one he doesn't get in."

The sound of angry voices soon came to the ears of the watching ferret, telling him the fellow was demanding admittance, while the servant was trying to keep him out.

Then a woman's voice was heard.

Mrs. Trench had been called to the head of the stairs by the rumpus.

"Who is this dreadful ruffian?" she asked.

"What does he want here? Such a noise is a disgrace! Didn't you see crape on the door, sir?"

"Hi did, my dear old girl," was the reply, with a genuine cockney accent; "but Hi wanted to see you 'all the same, don't ye know?"

"Put him out, Raipur!"

"Old hon! Heasy, hold girl! Hi know you. Hi'm Cockney Bob, hand you hare—"

"Stop! Come in! This way. I will see you in the parlor."

As the woman entered, with the man at her heels, Fire-Eye heard him chuckle with satisfaction:

"Hi thought has 'ow you'd see me, Lunnon Bess."

CHAPTER III.

COCKNEY BOB MAKES A BLUFF.

LONDON BESS!

The hidden detective gave a gasp of astonishment as he heard that name.

He knew it!"

London Bess was a famous English adventuress—a Queen of Crooks!

And this fellow who called himself Cockney Bob addressed the widow of the late Warren Trench by that name!

The woman was "wanted" in New York for conspiracy in one of the greatest swindles of modern times—the Atlantic Bank affair, by which the crooks got away with one hundred and ten thousand dollars.

Lanty Jack was "doing time" for the job, but London Bess had skipped to England, where she was promptly nabbed and shipped to Australia.

Prince Bruce had not heard of her escape from the convict colony, and his first thought was that Cockney Bob was "away off."

However, he kept perfectly still and listened.

The woman closed the door and turned haughtily on the unwelcome visitor.

"Sir," she said, coldly, "I do not know what you mean by addressing me in such an insolent manner!"

"Now, don't get on yer 'igh 'orse, Bess. Hi—"

"Stop! Evidently you have made a mistake, sir. You may think you know me, but—"

"Think it—Hi know hit, sweet'eart!"

"Insulting wretch! I'll have you thrown into the street!"

"Go ye hoddy ye don't, Bessie!" laughed the ruffian, as he settled himself comfortably on a chair, placing his dirty feet on another.

"Hi'm just as sporty as never, old girl."

The woman stood before the presuming tough, her hands clinched, head thrown back and eyes flashing. It was a magnificent pose, and Cockney Bob appreciated it, for he exclaimed:

"Bless my bloomin' heyes! but you hare a stunner! Used to be houter sight when yer played Queen fer the gang; but ye lay away hover them times now!"

"I do not know what you are talking about."

"Oh, drop hit, darling! hit won't work with me. Hi'm dead bon, has they say in this blawsted country."

Every word he uttered seemed to increase the woman's rage, and yet the detective, who was peering out from his place of concealment, fancied she was also beset by fear.

"Livin' hin great style 'ere, old girl. Hi like this. Hi'll ave ter stop with ye while Hi'm hin New York."

"Stop here! You will leave the house within ten minutes, never to return, unless you desire immediate arrest."

"Will Hi! Well, Hi should smile!"

Instead of smiling, Cockney Bob lay back and laughed in a very coarse and exasperating manner.

The woman was white with anger, and it seemed as if she longed to fly at his throat and grasp it with her white fingers, the delicately manicured nails of which were cutting into her palms, so tightly were her hands clinched.

"You have mistaken me for some other person, sir," she declared, her voice hoarse with passion.

"Oh, no! Hif that his true, why did you admit me hat all?"

"You were making a disgraceful row at the door, and my husband is dead in the house."

"Your 'usbam'! Ha! ha! ha! 'Ow many 'ave you 'ad, old girl?"

"I can endure this no longer! Disgrace or not, I will have you ejected!"

She started toward the door.

Cockney Bob calmly expectorated on the costly carpet, calling out, just as her hand touched the knob:

"When did ye see The Clincher last, darling?"

She whirled about, her hand clutching at the knob, her face ghastly.

"The Clincher! You know—Has he blowed?"

"Come back 'ere hand we'll talk hit hover. You can't work a bluff on me, hand you 'ave gave hit dead haway now."

She realized it was indeed useless to try frightening this big brute, and all her self-possession deserted her. Rushing at him like an enraged tigress, she hissed:

"You dog!—you brute! I could kill you! Oh, I'd like to strangle you! How dare you come here? How dare you? You were afraid of me once, and—"

"That was a long time ago, Bess. Things 'ave changed since. You can't put the 'ole gang hon me now by snappin' your fingers. Hin them days you 'ad the lay hover, but now I can do you by blowin' to the police. Hif Hi took a fancy to put a Bobby hon, Hi'd be paid well for the trick."

"It would be your last!"

"'Ow?"

"My power is not gone."

"You 'ave no gang."

"I have a gang you know nothing of—a power ten times more fearful than the old gang. If I point you out and say the word, to-morrow you will be found with the cord of the Strangler about your neck."

Cockney Bob made a wry face and felt of his bull like neck with his pudgy fingers.

"That's nice! But you won't do hit, don't ye know."

"Why not?"

"Hi can 'elp ye hout on yer game."

The woman started back a step, looking at him in consternation; but she quickly recovered.

"What game?"

"The one you hare workin', old girl. Hi dunno 'ow ye ever dropped to the duck, but I do know pretty well 'ow ye got rid hof 'im."

"You talk in riddles! Make your meaning plain. Who do you call 'duck'?"

Cockney Bob sneered.

"Who but this man Trench, whoever 'e his—or was. He was a duck."

"Nothing of the kind. I married the man legally, and I have lived with him since as a faithful wife should."

The Englishman threw back his head and laughed hoarsely, derisively.

Mrs. Trench stood before him, her face pallid with anger and fear, doing nothing.

"Well, that is a jolly go!" roared Bob.

"You a faithful wife!—hand you 'andsomer than never!"

"It may strike you as remarkable," said the woman, quietly; "but it is true. I have tried to get away from the old life, and—"

"You oughter know better, my girl. Hit can't be done. Hi've tried hit myself, but Hi wasn't cut hout for an 'ones' man to begin with. More than that, they wouldn't let me be 'ones' now hif Hi tried."

She threw out her hands with a fierce gesture.

"I was all right until Clincher Mike found me out, and now he has blowed to you!"

"No."

"Then, how did you find me?"

"Hi 'eard ye talking with him."

"Bah! Rot!"

"Hit's true, old girl. 'E got yer number, hand Hi caught hit."

"That was two days ago. If you tell the truth, you would have been round within as many hours."

"Hi was taken hin."

"Taken in?"

"Harrested."

"Oh, pinched?"

"Hi believe that's what they call hit him this blawsted country."

"For what were you pulled?"

"Touchin' a gent—took his ticker."

"If that were true, you would be on your way to the Island now."

"The gent didn't happen hagagainst me, hand Hi proved myself respectable to the judge. Then 'e let me hoff."

It was plain the woman doubted the story, for she questioned him closely about her meeting with the individual known as The Clincher. He was ready with his answers, and the hidden detective acquired a large amount of surprising information.

Fire-Eye now saw there was no mistake about the woman being London Bess, but he was still puzzled and filled with the greatest wonder.

How had she escaped from the convict colony?

And why was not her escape made known to the public?

Who was The Clincher?

These were some of the questions that puzzled him.

Certainly it was astounding that Mrs. Trench, the widow of the mysterious dead millionaire, was in fact London Bess, Queen of the Crooks.

The more he thought of it the more remarkable it seemed.

Had her husband been aware of her true history?

If so, then was it not probable he was anything but an honorable man?

Superintendent Byrnes had said there was a mystery about the affair, but Prince Bruce did not believe it possible the chief had suspected the actual truth.

And there were still more startling revelations to follow.

Plainly Cockney Bob had known the woman in England—had, in truth, been one of some gang which she controlled. In the past, he had feared her; but now that he fancied he had a hold on her, he showed his insolent, overbearing spirit.

That the woman really feared the man the hidden ferret could see, although she put on as bold face as possible.

Had Fire-Eye been a novice in the detective business, what he had discovered might have staggered him; as it was, he began to take a great interest in the affair, realizing he had not yet got at the inside facts of the case, by any means.

"What do you mean by saying you know my game?" the woman asked, after a brief silence, during which she had endeavored to regain her composure.

The English ruffian laughed.

"Mean just habout that," was his reply.

"What game do you speak of?"

"The big game you have been playin' now, old girl."

She shut her teeth with a click, a dangerous glitter in her eyes.

"There is such a thing as knowing too much," was her final assertion. "You mean—just what?"

"I mean that Hi know 'ow this 'usban' of yours appened to kick hover so quick. Hi know who gave 'im the little dose, my game beauty!"

CHAPTER IV.

COMING TO TERMS.

"HELLO! hello!" mentally exclaimed Fire-Eye. "This grows interesting! So Mr. Warren Trench was given a little dose! Well! well! well!"

The hidden detective listened eagerly for what was to follow. The deep shadows of the room prevented him from observing accurately the play of the woman's features, but he almost fancied she was genuinely astonished.

"There is such a thing as knowing too much for one's health," she laughed; "but you will not be troubled that way, Bob."

"Maybe Hi know more than you think Hi do."

"From what you have said, I am led to believe you do not know as much as I thought you did."

"Oh, you do run a merry bluff, old girl; but hit won't go with me."

"What do you mean by saying you know who gave my husband the dose?"

"Just habout what Hi said."

"Clear as mud! You are befogged, Bob, and you are getting me twisted. Talk straight."

"Well, old girl, if you want hit straight, Hi know Mr. Warren Trench was poisoned!"

Poisoned!

The interest of the concealed ferret was painful, for he expected another revelation.

Would the woman confess to this man who had once been a confederate of hers?

London Bess laughed outright.

"Well, you are cute!" was her sarcastic declaration. "You are really too shrewd to live long!"

"Hi take hit that is a threat."

The woman seemed to have quite regained her composure, and her manner was beginning to "break up" the English tough. She saw it, and was pleased.

"A threat? Why, Bob! how can you think such a thing of me?"

"Hi know ye hof hold."

"You think you know me, but you get a big head sometimes, my dear man. You do not begin to know London Bess."

"Well, Hi know who poisoned the hold duck."

"Who?"

"You!"

She was not startled in the least.

"You are really a cute one!" was her scornful remark. "Why should I poison him?"

"Hi suppose you wanted to get 'im hout hof the way, so you can blow his geldt hand get hanother sucker hon the string."

"You suppose! Why, you ought to know! You know so very much."

He growled uncomfortably, while she went on, in a most cutting manner:

"You were always famous for your shrewdness, Bob! You have made a big guess in this case—"

"Hand 'it hit fair."

"You think so."

"Know so"—doggedly.

"How do you know it? Where's your proofs? Don't flash a trick of this kind at me, unless you can produce proofs!"

She had turned on him like a tigress, and he quailed before her flashing eyes.

The hidden detective began to understand where her power lay, for it was now plain she could overawe a creature of Cockney Bob's caliber.

The English ruffian had taken her by surprise at first at a most unfortunate moment, and she had lost her nerve for a little while, but once more she was herself.

Her pose and manner showed she now believed she commanded the situation.

The way in which Cockney Bob moved about revealed the fact that his uneasiness increased with each passing moment.

"Proofs," he repeated. "Well, why didn't you 'ave an hatopsy hover the stiff?"

"I did not want it, Bob. I have a certificate of death—death by heart failure."

"'Eart failure!" coarsely laughed the man. "Nobody dies without 'eart failure. The bloke as is shot 'as 'eart failure. That is great!"

Still she was not disconcerted.

"That is all right. But, even supposing Mr. Trench died from some other cause than heart failure, did it ever occur to you that he may have taken his own life?"

"Got ye now!" roared Cockney Bob. "You hocknowlege hit!"

"Easy, man! There is a detective in the house somewhere!"

"A detective?"

"Sure."

"For what?"

"Because I sent for him to come here."

"You sent for him?"

"Just that."

"Come hoff!"

"I am giving it to you dead straight, Bob."

"What did ye do hit for?"

"Well, to begin with, there is nothing

like playing bold bluff. Is it likely there is anything crooked about a woman who sends to Police Headquarters for a detective to come into the house where lays the corpse of her husband, who died very suddenly and unexpectedly?"

The listening ferret smiled.

"Is that your little game?" was his thought. "Well, you may find you have fooled with fire."

Cockney Bob looked admiringly at the woman.

"You're sharp as ever, old girl!" was his exclamation. "Hi swear that is ha great trick!"

She snapped her fingers.

"Bob, you are still slow. I can lead you anywhere I like. What do you think of it?"

"Hi think you 'ave blowed yourself dead, old girl. Hi ham onto you, ye know."

"That's where you fool yourself. I simply deny everything, and you can prove nothing."

"Hi'll suggest han hatopsy. Before the funeral, you'll find some men haround to cut the hold duck hopen."

"Even then you would not find he was poisoned. Far from it. I will say one thing: He died suddenly—of his own free will—because he wanted to die! But he did not take poison."

That was certainly a singular statement to make, and the hidden detective wondered if she was still trying the game of bluff.

Had Warren Trench committed suicide?

If so, in what manner?

There could be no marks on his body, else they would have been discovered by the physician.

The woman swore he had not taken poison.

Fire-Eye determined to know who made out the certificate of death and question the man. The affair was certainly very mysterious, and nothing would satisfy him now until he had probed to the bottom of it.

"Hi dunno 'ow you hexpect me to believe that," said the English crook. "Why did 'e want to die?"

"He had enemies."

"Well?"

"There was but one way to escape them."

"To die?"

"Exactly."

"Well, that is a bloomin' poor way to hescape hanybody! Hi'd rather not hescape, thank yer!"

"His enemies were the Stranglers of India—human devils!"

"Still, Hi can't see why 'e should be fool henough to kill 'imself to get haway from them."

"There are many things you cannot understand, Bob. What I have told you is true."

"Still, Hi think hit would be a good plan to 'ave an hatopsy, old girl."

"I do not want it."

"Well, Hi do."

She was silent for a few moments, evidently thinking deeply. At length, she spoke:

"Look here, Bob, what's your price?"

The ruffian laughed with satisfaction.

"Now, you hare talkin', old girl! Hi don't know has Hi want an hatopsy."

"What's your price?"

"You 'ave got to come down great."

"Name it."

"Well, - Ei want habout five thousand dollars to start with, Bessie."

"So little?"

"Got to be ha gent, ye know. Hi 'ave lived so long hon the rough hedge hof the world that Hi want to know 'ow hit his hon Heasy street."

"Can I depend on you when I want aid sometimes?"

"Halways. Just come down with the stuff."

"Look here, Bob, I have not five thousand at hand, and I will not get possession of my husband's property and money until some time after the funeral. I will do the best I can for you now, and, later on, you shall have all you can blow."

The ruffian scowled, not at all well pleased.

"Hi take this as a put hoff. Look 'ere, Bess, Hi won't be fooled with this time, hand you may has well know hit now has later."

"I do not want to fool with you. I may need you, and I am willing to pay. At the

present moment, I have not more than a hundred dollars in my pocket. You shall have that. Right after the funeral, come to me, and you shall have more."

Still Bob growled.

"Hit's beastly, don't ye know!"

"It's the best I can do. If you are not satisfied, blow! But let me tell you this: I'll put the police onto you, so you will get a great many things you have managed to miss. I know considerable about the knifing of Liverpool Jim, and—"

"Oh, what's the use of bringin' up things of this sort?" cried Bob, getting to his feet. "Fork over the twenty p'unds, hand Hi'll see you later."

"All right," came coolly from the woman's lips as she took out her purse. "Here is the money. Now I want you to get right out of the house and not show up here again until the funeral is over. Do you understand?"

"Hi do, old girl; hand Hi ham hoff. But don't ye try to down Cockney Bob, fer hi'f ye do—"

He finished with a threatening gesture, as she let him out at the door.

The moment he was gone, her self-possession gave away.

"Satan seize him!" she half-cried and half-sobbed, staggering to a chair and dropping into it. "Everything is going against us now! It was bad enough to have The Clincher find me, after I have kept out of sight all these years; but this wretch— Oh! I could kill him!

"Does he think to conquer me—the fool! He expects to bleed me! We shall see! Cockney Bob's hours are limited! He will be an elegant corpse before three days are past! I will put the dreadful destroyers of the East after him!"

She sprung to her feet, uttering a cold, heartless laugh, and left the room.

CHAPTER V.

THE SNAKE.

PRINCE BRUCE came out from behind the heavy curtains.

"I have certainly struck something off color here," he muttered. "London Bess, Cockney Bob, The Clincher, poison, mystery—I don't know what else! I begin to think we'll have a real jolly time of it before we get through! I see arrests and revelations to come. The chief little dreamed the kind of a case I would tumble upon."

He improved an early occasion to slip from the parlor, very well satisfied with the time he had spent in that room.

Ascending the stairs, he came face to face with Mrs. Trench, who started slightly on seeing him.

"Who was that man who left the house a short time ago?" was the question the detective shot at her, knowing it would not do to pretend he had not seen Cockney Bob.

"That?" she faltered. "Oh, he was once in the employ of Mr. Trench."

"I fancied I had seen him before."

She looked alarmed a trifle, but smiled almost immediately.

"Is it possible? Still, I see no reason why you should remember him."

"He looked familiar—in fact, he strongly resembled English Bill or Cockney Bob."

"He is an Englishman, but his name is Oliver James."

The detective smiled.

"Well, Mr. Oliver James should take care of himself. He may be mistaken for one of the gentlemen I just named. In that case, I fancy he would get a chance to do time."

"Do time?" inquired the woman, a puzzled look on her face, as if she did not understand the meaning of his words.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Trench; that is a slang term meaning he might have to serve a sentence in prison."

Her face cleared.

"Oh, you detectives have such odd ways of speaking! I think Mr. James is a quiet and inoffensive man. He had heard of Mr. Trench's untimely death, and came to offer sympathy. He is so kind-hearted!"

"You did not take him to view the body?"

"No. The poor fellow was so overcome he could not bear to look on the one who had been his benefactor in the past."

She played her part well, and Prince admired her for it. He was well aware he was dealing with no ordinary woman criminal.

Nothing more was said about Mr. "Oliver James," but she asked him if he would not go to the room where Ongo Phal watched over the body and stood guard while the Indian slept.

"Ongo is faithful as a dog, but he requires some sleep. I have urged him to consent to this plan. You must be constantly on your guard, for there is no telling how or when the Thugs may come."

"You may trust me, madam."

"Thank you. Something tells me I can."

Fire-Eye found the heathen still hanging over the coffin when he entered the room where the corpse lay.

Ongo Phal gazed long and searchingly at the detective, as if seeking to read Prince's thoughts.

"The old wretch has eyes like daggers!" was the detective's mental exclamation.

Ongo shook his head, as if he were in doubt.

Fire-Eye came forward and motioned for the old man to rest on a couch that was in the room.

Again the shriveled, skinny wretch shook his head, expressing his doubts by means of signs.

Like a flash, the detective whipped out a revolver, wheeling about in his tracks and pointing it first at one door and then at the other. Then he restored it to his pocket and looked at Ongo.

Something like a look of approval crossed the heathen's face, but still he hovered over the coffin.

With another lightning movement, Fire-Eye produced a knife, and he struck several swift blows at the empty air, as if he were battling with assailants. The knife disappeared as swiftly as had the revolver.

Ongo Phal nodded, sunk into a chair, his eyes closed—he slept!

"Well, that is about the quickest piece of business I ever saw!" muttered Prince. "He was satisfied I could take care of myself, and he no longer hesitated to trust everything to me. He went off the hooks in a jiffy."

Fire-Eye wandered lightly about the room, finally stopping by the coffin and looking down at the face of the dead.

"How much he looks as if he were sleeping!" was his thought. "Were he not in the coffin, I'd never dream him dead."

He put his hand down and touched the face of the corpse. It was cold and unpleasant to the touch.

Prince felt that he had struck a mystery of the greatest magnitude.

The woman had said this man died to escape his foes.

"In that case, it was surely a case of suicide," thought the detective. "He must have taken poison. Perhaps Cockney Bob was right in thinking it murder."

He had not decided on the course he would pursue, but was determined to know the truth sooner or later.

All was still in that room of the dead. Old Ongo Phal did not seem to breathe, as he sat humped over on his chair, his position cramped and uncomfortable. He resembled some ghastly old mummy.

What was that?

The ferret's keen ears fancied he heard a stealthy sound somewhere in the shadowy apartment, but he could not tell from which quarter the noise issued. It was a faint rustle, as of somebody moving with the greatest caution.

Fire-Eye was on the alert now, his hand having dropped to the butt of the revolver. He peered all about him, seeing nothing astir, listening for a repetition of the sound.

Silence! He heard his heart beating heavily—nothing more.

"It was my imagination," he told himself. But that did not satisfy him, for he knew he was not inclined to imagine such things.

It took a great deal to shake his nerve, and he had never felt steadier in his life.

For all of that, he knew he was in a house of mystery. The master of that house had deliberately died to escape enemies who were terrible and relentless.

Not satisfied with his death, those enemies were still determined to mutilate his body!

They were the Stranglers of India—the men of Rajputana.

He knew they had ways of creeping upon their foes with the silence of death, and—

Again he heard the rustling sound!

Then his eyes were attracted to a movement in the breast of the loose garment old Ongo Phal wore. It was bulging and stirring, as if a living thing were squirming beneath it.

Fascinated, the detective watched and waited.

All at once, he came near uttering a sharp expression of astonishment and dismay, for something was thrust out from Ongo Phal's bosom.

That something was the hooded head of a cobra!

The eyes of the venomous serpent twinkled and its forked tongue played between its lips. It saw the spell-bound ferret, and then began gliding steadily and swiftly from the bosom of its sleeping master.

CHAPTER VI.

THE EVIL EYE.

NEVER for a moment did the snake turn its eyes from the orbs of the man it had selected for its victim. Swiftly its horrid body glided into view, and the detective calculated it must be about six feet in length.

Fire-Eye did not wonder he had been seized by a feeling of repulsion the moment his eyes first rested on Ongo Phal.

It was enough to fill one with horror to think of the old heathen carrying the serpent about with him, constantly hidden from view.

The Indian slept on, while the snake drew itself from his bosom.

The detective spoke to Ongo in a whisper, but the old man did not hear.

The snake swayed its head from side to side, beginning to hiss and distend its hood. Gradually it threw itself into a coil, and Fire-Eye knew it meant to strike very soon.

"I'll shoot the thing!"

That was his thought, but he found himself unable to do so. He was seized with a feeling of utter helplessness, and when he would have spoken aloud to Ongo Phal, not so much as a whisper could he utter.

Then, instead of growing still more frightened, Prince became enraged, calling himself a miserable coward, and feeling very much chagrined to think he could be thus overcome, for he had always ridiculed the idea that serpents could "charm" human beings.

Although he was not aware of it, his eyes commenced to glow as they always did when he was angry. They seemed to almost shoot forth a fiery light.

Immediately a change came over the manner of the snake. Its hood decreased in size and it ceased to hiss. Gradually the swaying motion of its head stopped, and it was as motionless as a serpent of stone.

Then Prince Bruce found he could move, speak, or do anything he liked.

Unconsciously, he had actually charmed the cobra!

Is it surprising that a man with such wonderful eyes should be the dread and terror of the crooks against whom he waged relentless warfare?

All at once the truth dawned on the detective, and he smiled with satisfaction.

"So your eyes were no match for mine, Mr. Snake. Well, I am glad to discover this power. I shall not be afraid of serpents after this—unless they are connected with stimulating drinks."

Something caused Ongo Phal to open his eyes at this point, and the old rascal started wide awake, uttering an exclamation of astonishment.

"Snake!" he cried. "Snake bite!"

The detective whistled softly.

"So you can speak some English, you old rascal! I thought you did not understand it."

Ongo looked disgusted with himself, as if he was badly "broken up" by the slip he had made.

"No spik much," was his explanation.

"Look out for snake!"

"Oh, I'm not afraid of your old snake. He'll never hurt anything."

"Bite! bite! Poison—kill!"

"He won't bite me. See how quiet he is."

The Indian saw, and he could not understand it. The cobra still remained absolutely motionless.

"You hoodoo!" Ongo suddenly cried, shrinking back from the detective. "You have evil eye! Go 'way, white man!"

The ferret saw the old Indian was actually afraid of him, which satisfied him not a little.

"Call in your snake," he commanded.

Ongo began a strange crooning noise, which he continued several minutes, absolutely without result.

The snake refused to stir.

"Take off hoodoo!" he entreated. "No make him do any more if hoodoo stay. He be spoil."

"Great Scott!" thought Fire-Eye. "I do not know how to take it off any more than I know how I put it on!"

But he was not going to confess that to Ongo Phal.

"I saved my life by putting the spell on him," said the detective aloud; "and I put it on hard. Perhaps I will not be able to take it off at once."

He began making mystical passes with his hands, chanting some stuff he did not know the meaning of himself, and, pretty soon, the snake's head commenced to sway.

Ongo Phal took up the chanting as Prince stopped, then he caused the snake to slowly glide back into his bosom and disappear.

The detective breathed easier when it was all over, but he took care not to let Ongo Phal see how much he was relieved.

He could not understand how he had obtained control of the deadly cobra, but he felt it was well to make use of Ongo Phal's awe for him, inspired by the snake-charming fear.

The old heathen looked overcome by what he had witnessed.

"In East," he said, "white man be fakir."

And then, after some moments, as if still in doubt, he asked:

"White man study magic? How much he know?"

"That is my secret, Mr. Phal. I'm not giving myself away this afternoon."

The old heathen was anything but pleased by this. Finally, he asked another question:

"White man travel in India?"

"Perhaps so."

"Meet Gebal Mahl?"

"Perhaps so."

"Know the sign?" Then the old wretch made a queer symbol that Prince did not understand.

The detective was forced to shake his head.

"Then white man yet have much to learn."

"There is other magic besides the magic of India," declared Fire Eye.

"What it 'mou't to?" was Old Ongo's contemptuous question.

"Some time you may find out it amounts to a great deal. It enables one man to read another's secrets."

"Bah!"

"You do not believe? Perhaps I may convince you. I can tell you something about yourself."

"Tell!"

The detective suddenly caught both of Ongo's wrists and held them with a grip of iron. He was able to summon a feeling of terrible wrath at will, and he did so now, looking straight into the heathen's eyes.

Ongo Phal uttered a gasping cry and shrunk back, trembling violently. He saw the white man's eyes literally dart fire into his own, and a great fear overcame him.

"Ah!" cried the detective, in a deep and thrilling voice. "I can look straight into your heart! It is laid bare before me—I read its secrets! Above them all is the secret of life and death! You hold it! It is your power to grant either!"

The Indian cried out inarticulately, and Prince Bruce was aware he had struck the target fairly.

"You have made many victims," he went on, feeling an inspiration. "One of them is in this room. He no longer breathes, and you placed him thus! Deny it if you dare!"

Ongo Phal did not deny anything, for he was too frightened to utter a sound. His teeth chattered, and he tried to tear his gaze

away; but those burning eyes held him spell-bound.

The head of the cobra protruded for an instant, but it quickly disappeared, as if the snake had been frightened by what it saw.

It was a strange tableau.

Not in the least did Fire-Eye relax his hold, for he had determined on a course of action, understanding the heathen was terrified nearly out of his senses.

He would attempt to force a confession from Ongo Phal's lips! Perhaps he might get at the bottom of the mystery at one stroke.

"Tell the truth!" he commanded, his eyes still burning—"tell the truth or suffer!"

"Mercy!" gasped the Indian, writhing with fear.

"Mercy!" returned Prince, his voice and aspect being enough to awe any ordinary man. "Speak—or I will give you the mercy you have meted out to your victims!"

"What do you know?" gurgled Ongo Phal. "Take eyes away! Can't speak!"

"Then I will put the hoodoo on you!"

At this, the old heathen utterly collapsed, sinking limply into the detective's grasp.

"Why should speak?" he gasped. "You know—you read the heart! I feel the evil eye burn into me! You must know all now!"

"I do know all; but the only way you can save yourself is by confessing."

"Then I will tell."

At last, the truth was to be wrung from the lips of the frightened wretch.

"Speak! He is dead! You did it! How?"

"I—"

There was a sound at the door, and the voice of an astounded woman asked:

"What is the meaning of this?"

CHAPTER VII.

THE COBRA STRIKES.

It was the voice of London Bess—otherwise known as Mrs. Warren Trench.

She had appeared at a most inopportune moment.

The detective breathed a faint ejaculation of anger and dismay.

"If I could have had one minute more!" he thought.

The woman advanced into the room, repeating her question:

"What is the meaning of this?"

Ongo Phal suddenly straightened up, uttering some words in his own language, at which the woman halted and looked at Prince in dismay and alarm.

"Who are you?" she demanded. "Ongo Phal says you have the power of the Evil Eye. Can it be that you are—" She paused.

"I am Prince Bruce, madam," smiled the ferret, having released the shaking heathen.

"You have another name; you are sometimes called—"

"Fire-Eye."

Mrs. Trench was pale, as he could see for all of the deep shadows of the room.

"I have heard of you," she declared, plainly making an effort to control her voice. "When I called for a detective, I did not think such a famous sleuth-hound would be sent me."

"Thank you," bowed Prince, quietly. "Had you thought so—would you have been pleased?"

There was a deep significance in the question, but she pretended not to appreciate it.

"Of course I would, sir. But the work of guarding a dead man seems to me scarcely the kind you are adapted for."

"Sometimes terrible secrets are locked in the breasts of the dead, madam."

She lifted her eyebrows, a puzzled look flitting over her handsome face.

"That is indeed true, but there is no mystery here."

"You forget you told me of his relentless foes. You forget you did not tell me how he came to have such enemies."

Her head went back with a haughty, defiant motion.

"I told you all that was necessary, sir! You were not engaged to come here and pry into affairs of a private nature! Your duty is simply to aid Ongo Phal in protect-

ing my poor husband's body from mutilation."

"And I trust I may do my duty fully. That is my intention, madam; and I trust you will not misunderstand me. I find Ongo Phal a snake-charmer and magician. By way of diversion, I tried a few tricks on him."

"Are you sure diversion was your only object?"

"What other object could I have, madam?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"That is not for me to say. Every family has its hidden skeleton—and there is such a thing as blackmail!"

He felt the shot, but it simply aroused his indignation. His face flushed.

"Did you ever hear that Fire-Eye resorted to blackmail? I am not in that kind of business, madam."

"I trust not. This is no place to discuss anything of the kind."

He looked at her somewhat wonderingly, for she was fully composed now, seeming not the least disconcerted by anything she had discovered.

He thought she did not show a deep and overpowering grief for her husband, but that was not to be wondered at in London Bess.

Ongo Phal now spoke a few more words in the language the ferret did not understand.

The woman bowed quietly, turning to Prince again.

"It seems your eyes have frightened Ongo," she observed. "He says he dares not remain along with you in this room. He is thoroughly awake now, and will stay so for some hours. I am satisfied to trust him alone with the body, so you will kindly look after other parts of the house."

This was a dismissal from the room, and the detective quietly withdrew.

"In ten seconds more I would have forced the secret from his lips!" muttered Prince, regretfully, as he found himself alone. "I fear the opportunity will not come again. She has remained to learn all that happened, and now she will be on guard for me. It is unfortunate."

Unfortunate it certainly was, but it could not be helped. He had learned enough to make him doubly eager to get at the entire truth.

Warren Trench had not been poisoned by his wife, nor had he committed suicide. Ongo Phal was responsible for the man's mysterious death.

There was no doubt in respect to that, but the woman had asserted her husband died "of his own free will."

Did she speak the truth?

Could it be possible?

What would be the result of the solution of the mystery? He already knew the woman was London Bess, and he could arrest her any moment; but he might be able to explode a bomb by having her arrested for the murder of Warren Trench, taking in Ongo Phal as an accomplice.

Prince was given plenty of time to contemplate the matter.

The woman remained within the room of the dead for nearly an hour. He knew when she came out, but he managed to keep from view.

Having a key that would admit him any time, Prince slipped out and sought a lunch near the hour of dusk.

The heathen doorkeeper Raipur was not on guard when he came back and admitted himself.

As Warren Trench had been a man who secluded himself and made no friends among his neighbors, the house of death was not visited by those about.

Fire-Eye felt a premonition that this last night in which the corpse would remain in the house might bring adventure of some kind, and he wandered about the house, inspecting every dark corner.

The bereft wife met him on the stairs.

"All is quiet?" she questioned, anxiously.

"I see nothing of an alarming nature," was his reply.

"Still, I am so nervous! I feel a deadly something in the very air! They will come to-night—I know it! Be on your guard! I shall not sleep!"

"It will be much better if you try to

sleep. Take something to compel sleep, if necessary. You certainly will need all your strength to-morrow."

"Thank you," she murmured, looking at him in a strange manner. "I suppose you are right. And still the horror of it seems to fill the very air. Oh, you must watch, watch, watch!"

She did not seem to be acting, and he could see she was really trembling.

When he had said what he could to reassure her, he continued on his rounds, while she retired to her room.

The house was silent—the silence of death. No sounds could he hear save those made by himself. The stillness was really oppressive.

Like lead the hours wore away.

It was near midnight when Fire-Eye was again overcome by a conviction of impending danger, and once more he started to wander about over the house.

In the darkness of the hall he seemed to feel a presence near at hand, and his fingers were uplifted to turn on the gas, which flickered low.

At that instant, something encircled his neck, but from whence it came he could not tell. He grasped at it, and felt a tautly-drawn cord that shut off his wind.

Down to the floor he was hurled, and a weight on his body pinned him fast, while the horrid cord cut into his throat and prevented his taking a breath or uttering a sound. With terrible swiftness, it robbed him of his strength and rendered him helpless as a babe!

He knew then by whom he had been assailed, and a fear such as had never before been his came over him.

He was in the power of the Stranglers! The death-cord was about his neck!

Was this to be the end? Was he to die in this terrible manner?

He made one last despairing effort and turned his body. But, that was all. A weight on his breast forced him back. Dimly he saw a dark and frightful face above him, two wicked eyes glaring into his.

Never had he dreamed the Stranglers' cord would thus rob a powerful man of his strength and render him so utterly helpless.

He did not doubt he was dying, for bright lights began to float before his eyes, and he heard sweet music that seemed far away. He saw fair faces, and the fragrance of flowers filled his nostrils.

Then came a change. Through these visions he seemed to behold a dark figure spring on the creature that was strangling him. He heard a shriek that rung through the house, and the light was turned on.

It showed him London Bess standing there. It also showed him a dark-faced man battling with a serpent—a hooded cobra—that struck again and again!

Down to the floor fell the one of the dark face, lying still, never to strangle another man!

The cobra coiled on his breast, and beyond the snake grinned the hideous face of Ongo Phal!

CHAPTER VIII.

PLAYING THE SHADOW.

BLANKNESS, darkness, oblivion followed. The world seemed to reel away in a bloody mist and be swallowed up by eternal night.

This could not have lasted long.

He was next conscious of hearing voices—of hearing a familiar voice saying:

"Why did you do it, Ongo Phal? Had you waited twenty seconds more, the Strangler would have finished him—and he is dangerous. I made a mistake in sending for a detective, and—"

"Mistake to have him kill in house."

"You think it would bring an investigation, and the result might betray us? I don't know but you are right. You are almost always right. Still, he is a terribly dangerous man, and I fear he suspects a great deal. It cannot be you spared him from love, Ongo?"

"Bah! Love! Hate him!"

"And still, you fear him."

"He **have** evil eye."

"He must have some wonderful power to charm the cobra. It was amazing."

"Snake 'fraid. Fire in him eyes."

"The man is called Fire-Eye."

"Devil-Eye better name."

"You have disposed of the Strangler's body?"

"It gone."

"I want no dead men around this house."

"Not even man up stair?"

"Not even him."

"Soon be gone—be bury."

"And then—"

"Trust to Ongo Phal. He know the magic of India. He keep him word."

"If you fail—"

"Stop! Make no threat! Will not fail. You shall see soon."

"Are you sure this detective is not really dead? He remains so still!"

"Not dead; come around pretty quick soon right away. Look! Him breathe. See eye quiver. He be all right in ten minute."

Prince saw it might arouse suspicion to feign unconsciousness longer, so he uttered a groan and opened his eyes.

The handsome widow of Warren Trench was standing near the couch on which the ferret lay, while Ongo Phal was bending over him. He saw the bosom of the heathen's loose garment in motion, and he did not doubt the deadly cobra was there.

"Ha!" cried Ongo, pretending delight. "Man come better—man get choke—him all right."

The detective lifted a hand to his throat.

"What was it?" he faintly asked. "Something about my neck—something that took away all my strength."

"That the cord," grinned the snake-charmer. "Man try to strangle you."

"Ha! I remember! Where is he now?"

"Gone."

"Where?"

"Get away—run. Hear Ongo Phal come; be scared."

"But—but, I thought—"

The woman looked anxious, and Ongo Phal shook his head with violence.

"You no think--dream."

"Then it was a dream; but I fancied I saw the snake strike my assailant until he fell down dead."

"No! no! no! I keep snake. I come—Thug run--get away."

It was plain these mysterious people did not wish the detective to know the cobra had found a victim.

Fire-Eye started up and looked around. They were in the room where lay the corpse of Warren Trench.

The heathen was still on guard.

Remarkable it certainly was that such great care should be taken to guard a dead man: and no less remarkable that the strange enemies of the dead should pursue him even after the breath of life had left his body forever.

In a short time, Prince was himself again, quite able to get up and move about.

He knew the heathen and the cobra had saved his life, but, since overhearing Ongo Phal's reason for doing so, he could not feel any deep sense of gratitude.

And the beautiful woman before him had regretted the strangler did not complete his work!

He had heard that London Bess was utterly heartless and unscrupulous, and now he had not a doubt on that point. She would hesitate at nothing that might remove a foe or a dangerous man from her path.

He wondered she did not take this opportunity to dismiss him from the house, using as an excuse the fact that he had been assaulted and overcome by one of the foes he was engaged to protect her against.

But, she did nothing of the kind, and he almost felt that she had grown to feel less afraid of him since the affair with the strangler.

He knew she little suspected the knowledge he possessed. Had she dreamed how much he knew, he could not have escaped alive after lying helpless and unconscious in that room of the dead.

"You will not wonder now, sir, at our terror of these enemies—you cannot wonder at it," she said. "They are relentless—they never sleep, they never give us any rest!"

There was something like despair in her voice and her face, and he could see her nerve was shaken by what had happened. She was extremely pale.

"No, I do not wonder," was his confession. "It is wonderful how quickly the cord robs one of strength."

"You know there is a certain place on the throat where a man may strangle himself by the pressure of a woolen string. It has been done. The Thugs know exactly how to touch that spot, and so they quickly rob their chosen victims of strength."

"Why should they choose me as a victim?"

"Because you are here in my employ—here to guard against them."

The woman had but few more words to say, but when she left the room, she took care that the detective did not remain with Ongo Phal.

Contrary to his expectations, the remainder of the night passed without incident.

The next day brought the funeral.

The service at the house consisted of a simple prayer, and there were not many carriages to follow the dead man to his last resting place.

When Greenwood was reached, it happened that another burial was taking place close to the grave prepared for the remains of Warren Trench.

A large number of people were gathered about the spot, some of whom were mere morbid sight-seekers.

The two companies mingled.

The handsome widow wished the coffin opened at the grave, and this was done, permitting her to take a farewell look at the face of her husband.

"Ongo Phal, silent and watchful, hideous as ever, was on hand, an occasional motion about his bosom telling Fire-Eye the deadly cobra was there.

The detective was on the alert, for he had been warned the Thugs might attempt to make a final stroke at the grave.

As the weeping widow bent over her dead husband, a figure suddenly appeared at the opposite side of the coffin. It was a man attired in conventional clothes, but with a face dark as the shadows of night.

The watching ferret saw something glitter in this person's fingers, and he was about to leap upon him, when Ongo Phal screamed and struck out with both hands.

The stranger of the dark face held a knife, and he slashed at the snake-charmer—but missed.

Ongo Phal's blow sent him staggering.

Prince tried to grasp the fellow, but somebody gave him a thrust that made him miss in his calculation.

Women shrieked and men uttered cries of astonishment and indignation.

In the midst of this excitement, the mysterious man with the dagger slipped away and was lost to the view of the heathen who had blocked his game.

Fire-Eye, however, did not lose sight of the stranger of the dark face.

"I think I'll pipe you off, my honey," muttered the detective, as he followed the fellow through the shifting crowd. "In that way I may get at the bottom of this mystery. My duties are ended here, anyway."

So when the dark-faced individual left Greenwood there was a trailer at his heels.

The afternoon was close and sultry, with a storm threatening, and a great many people were now hurrying from Greenwood, which made Prince's task comparatively easy.

He followed his game to the station of the elevated railroad, where a train was taken.

At the Atlantic avenue station the dark-faced man left the train, hurrying down the stairs and into the depot of the Long Island Railroad.

Prince was not far behind.

"That fellow looks enough like Ongo Phal to be a brother of the old wretch," thought the ferret.

The detective was near enough to hear the man call for his ticket, and Prince bought one for the same destination, taking care to do so in a manner that attracted no attention.

Then he kept out of sight until the train was announced, making his way on board in the midst of the little knot of people that crowded through the gate.

The man he was shadowing took a seat about midway of the car, while Prince sat further back.

The detective had purchased a paper, which he perused as the train rolled along,

simply taking care at the stops to make sure his game did not slip off unexpectedly.

It was evident that, after getting fairly out of Greenwood, the man had not bothered his head about pursuers, probably thinking there was no reason to do so.

The destination was finally reached, and the stranger of the dark face got off at the front end of the car, while Prince reached the station platform by the rear steps.

It was one of those miserable little collections of buildings often designated by the circulars issued by the railroads as "beautiful and charming villages."

Not once casting a look over his shoulder, the shadowed man set off from the station, walking at a swift pace along the dusty and furrowed road.

"Here goes for a foot-race," thought Prince, as he followed.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HOUSE OF MYSTERY.

NIGHT was coming on.

Away in the Northwest black thunderheads were thrusting their tumbled forms up against the sky, and there was that peculiar hush in the air that precedes a storm.

In the fields cattle were huddled in groups or were lying down.

By the dusty waysides crickets were already announcing the fact that summer had almost fled and autumn advanced apace.

In the denser and more gloomy portions of the woods through which the road sometimes wound its snaky way, tree-toads were sending forth their sad plaint.

There were dark shadows in the dismal woods, and the detective felt that it would be a first-class section in which to waylay a man.

He kept his hand thrust into the side pocket of his coat where a trusty revolver rested, ready for instant use in case of emergency.

His hat was slouched over his eyes, his coat collar turned up about his chin, his shoulders hunched, and, in fact, his whole appearance changed from what it was when he followed the dark-faced man from Greenwood Cemetery.

He had a way of changing the expression of his face until it looked quite unlike that of Prince Bruce, and this without application of artificial disguise of any sort.

This trick had proven of great benefit to him on many occasions, actually saving his life more than once.

He wondered if anything would come of this tracking of the strange man who had made a last desperate attempt to strike a knife into the corpse of the mysterious Warren Trench.

Little did he know what terrible perils it would ultimately lead him into; but had he foreseen them all, he would not have hesitated or turned back.

Thunder began to mutter sullenly in the distance, coming nearer gradually, and darkness approached.

"I am likely to get a drenching," thought Prince. "That fellow—Hello!"

The man he had followed so far turned from the road into a lane that led still deeper into the woods.

"I may never come out, but I am going in" muttered the ferret, his teeth set.

He also turned into the lane, which seemed a sort of bridle-path, but he proceeded with the utmost caution.

He did not go far before he came to a clearing, in the midst of which stood an old stone house. Around this house a high wall had been constructed.

The man Prince had followed was admitted beyond the wall by means of a gate that opened at a signal, as if some one stood on guard.

From the cover of the woods the detective surveyed the strange place, wondering what sort of a retreat he had discovered.

There was an air of desolation and mystery about everything in the vicinity, and Prince began to feel he had a big job before him if he penetrated inside those walls of stone and discovered what lay there.

The house was entirely surrounded by woods, and the ferret circled about the place until he came back to the path that led from the guarded gate to the main highway.

There was no break in the wall, which might prove somewhat difficult to scale.

By the time he had completed the circuit darkness was upon him.

No light could be seen gleaming out from the singular house, which rose grim and forbidding in the midst of the lonely woods.

"I am going over that wall pretty soon," thought Prince. "I'll find what there is on the other side if I live long enough. I feel like following this mystery up to the end, and I reckon I'll do it."

He did not have to wait long for darkness dense enough to enable him to scale the wall without any great danger of discovery.

Choosing a point at some distance from the gate, near which he feared a guard was stationed, he slipped up to the wall, discovering it was about seven feet in height.

Then he searched until some breaks were found, by means of which he drew himself up and grasped the top. After that it was not very difficult to get over.

He hugged close to the top of the wall, knowing he might be detected there, and he did not hesitate long about dropping on the other side.

He landed fairly on the shoulders of a man, who was crouching at the base of the wall.

This man was hurled forward on his face, partially stunned, and before he could utter a sound or make a struggle, Fire-Eye had him by the throat.

"Silence!" hissed the detective in the ear of the unknown. "Make a sound and I will shut off your wind for good!"

He had the advantage then, and he knew it. Although astounded by landing on a human being in such a manner, he felt sure he was not half so surprised as the other person, whoever he was.

Prince looked around to see if he could detect others near at hand, for he did not know but he had leaped into an ambush of foes. It struck him as possible that the man he had followed was aware he was being trailed all the time, and had prepared to receive him warmly in case he scaled the wall.

If that were true, the individual was certainly badly "left" this time.

As he crouched there with his hands on the man's throat, a faint flash of distant lightning glowed for an instant. It showed him the face of the person on whose shoulders he had landed.

He was astonished to see a rather handsome young man, whose face was entirely smooth, save for a light mustache.

The young man seemed equally astonished by the appearance of the detective, for he whispered:

"Who are you?"

"I was just about to ask you that question," returned Prince.

"What are you doing here?"

"Prospecting."

"You do not belong here?"

"Think so?"

"I do. There are only black-faced men who come inside these walls."

"How about yourself?"

"I am a prowler."

"Ha! This is interesting! You confess you have no right here?"

"Why should I deny it?" was the counter-question.

Prince was in doubt. He did not know what to think of this young man whom he had met in such a singular manner. Who was he? and why was he there?

"What do you mean by saying only black-faced men come inside these walls?" he questioned.

"Just what I say? If you know anything of this place, you should know I tell the truth."

The detective now took his hands from the stranger's throat, uttering this warning:

"Make no outcry, if you value your life. I am armed and ready to silence you."

"There is little danger of me uttering an outcry. I think too much of my life."

"Then—"

"It would bring Mr. Dundal Wombo and his black tigers on us before we could scale the wall."

"Who is Mr. Dundal Wombo?"

"The man who owns that house."

"But his name—it is so peculiar!"

"No more peculiar than the man."

"Who is he? what is he?"

"He is a Hindoo—a heathen a heartless monster, it is said—a man of mystery."

Prince was so intensely interested that he scarcely noted the close approach of the storm that had been so long threatening.

Here was a person who could tell him something of the bleak house of mystery and its peculiar inmates.

But now another flash of lightning, clearer and more brilliant than the first, aroused them both to the danger of being seen.

"Unless you are a particular friend of Mr. Wombo's, I advise you to be getting out of here," said the unknown young man.

"And you?"

"I fancy I will get away as soon as you will permit. If I were found here, people would look in vain for Harold Trench tomorrow."

Fire-Eye started.

"Trench—is your name Trench?"

"It is."

"Any relation of Mr. Warren Trench, of Thirty-sixth street, New York City?"

"Yes, sir."

"What?"

"The man was my father's half-brother."

"Do you know he is dead?"

"I do."

"You do not seem greatly interested."

"I have no interest in him. Why should I have, when he was ever father's bitterest enemy? He hated my father, for all of their relation, and he sought in every way to injure him. No, now that Warren Trench is dead, he is no more to me than he was in life."

Something told the detective he had made an important find in this young man, for Harold Trench might be able to throw some light on the mystery of the singular man who had that day been carried to his last resting-place in Greenwood Cemetery.

Fire-Eye no longer doubted the man he had so strangely found was really what he claimed.

"How can we get out?" he asked.

"Come, I will show you. I took good care to provide a means of retreat."

The thunder was now rumbling hoarsely near at hand, and the flashes of lightning came with alarming frequency. They were certainly in great danger of being seen, although the old stone house lay dark and silent in the midst of the inclosure.

They crawled along a short distance at the base of the wall, and then Harold Trench whispered:

"Here is a rope that is made fast on the other side. Watch your opportunity and go over between the flashes."

The detective did as directed, seizing the most propitious moment, as it seemed; but barely had he reached the top of the wall when a bright flash plainly revealed his figure.

Somewhere a rifle cracked sharply, and, with a cry of pain, Fire-Eye leaped erect, and plunged headlong from the wall.

CHAPTER X.

HAROLD'S STORY.

"SHOT!"

The word came from Harold Trench's lips, as he crouched back at the foot of the wall.

He had seen the detective leap erect and plunge headlong from the wall, and he felt that Fire-Eye had been instantly killed by the bullet of the unknown marksman.

For a moment, he was filled with unutterable horror, seeming unable to move.

Then he realized the full peril of his position.

"I must get out of here without delay! I'll be the next target!"

Waiting until another flash had faded, he went up the rope and over the wall with remarkable agility.

As he dropped to the ground, he more than half expected to strike upon the body of the man he had so strangely met and whom he had seen shot down by the hidden marksman.

Nothing of the kind occurred. He struck on the hard ground, and there at the foot of the wall he crouched, waiting until the lightning should come again, gathering up the rope in the mean time.

The flash came very soon, and Harold looked for the body of Fire-Eye, which he expected to find near at hand.

A cry of amazement and wonder broke from his lips, for he saw nothing of the ferret!

The body was nowhere in the vicinity!

"Gone!"

Harold shivered. There was something uncanny about this sudden and astounding disappearance of the man he had seen shot down.

What could have become of the body?

"Those black-faced devils must be on the watch outside as well as inside the wall," he thought. "They are liable to attack me any instant!"

With one slash of a keen knife, he severed the rope, having no time to unloosen the knots, and then, covered by the darkness, he ran for the woods, crouching low.

He was fortunate in reaching the shelter of the trees before the next flash came, and there he turned to look back at the house of mystery.

The storm was now almost ready to break, and the next vivid flare of lightning showed him everything in the opening, but nowhere could he see the body of his late companion.

The thunder that followed the lightning was so severe that the ground seemed to shake and shudder with an overpowering terror.

"Poor fellow!" muttered Harold, regretfully. "This infernal storm baffled me, and I fear it caused his death. It was a cry of pain that broke from his lips. Yes, he must be dead."

"If you refer to me, I am not killed so easily, thank you!"

The young man turned just as the sky once more burst forth in fire, and he literally recoiled from the pale face that confronted him.

The face of Fire-Eye!

"You!" gasped Harold. "You are not dead?"

"Do I look like a ghost?"

"You really do."

"Well, I am not, by any means," was the cheerful reply. "I am Fire-Eye in the flesh."

To convince the other of this, the detective reached forth and grasped his hand.

"The shot—the bullet—your cry and fall!" spluttered Harold. "I do not understand. Wasn't you struck?"

"I got it in the neck—that is, the bullet whistled close enough to touch me and draw blood from my neck. That is all; the skin was barely broken. I leaped from the wall instantly, knowing a second bit of lead might be more dangerous than the first proved."

"Thank fortune you were not killed! It was certainly a narrow escape! But, let's get away from here as quickly as we can. The storm is coming, and we shall get a wetting before we can possibly reach the Glen."

"The Glen?"

"Yes; that is where I am stopping."

"How far away?"

"Three miles."

"Is there no nearer shelter?"

"Barret's Hotel, about a mile and a half."

"Let's make for that."

"It's not a very respectable place."

"What's the odds, so long as we get a roof over our heads?"

"Then to Barret's we will go."

"Lead the way."

Harold had coiled up the rope until it was handy to carry, and he now struck out, with Fire-Eye at his heels. They made rapid progress, for all of the darkness, the young man picking his way along with a skill that showed he knew the surroundings thoroughly.

After a little, they came to a road, and along this they raced, with the thunder rumbling and crashing over their heads.

They were not destined to reach the hotel without getting wet, for, all at once, the storm swept down upon them.

At length the lights of the hotel gleamed out before them, but they were pretty well drenched when the place was reached.

Old Man Barret received them, and they were soon drying their clothes before an open fire they had requested lighted in the room Prince ordered.

"Well," said the detective, sitting in his shirt-sleeves, with his feet on the fender,

while he smoked a fairly good cigar, "this isn't so bad as it might be."

"But it's bad enough," returned Trench, who was strangely moody and downcast. "Why should this infernal storm come up and ruin everything?"

Fire-Eye darted an inquiring glance at his companion, who had lighted his cigar but allowed it to go out almost immediately. The young man was a sort of a mystery, but one the ferret fancied could be easily solved.

"You have not told me what took you to that singular place," he observed, insinuatingly.

Harold looked at him sharply.

"Can I trust you?"

"I think so."

"I believe I can, and I will tell you the whole story. It is not long."

He settled himself as comfortably as possible, and began:

"I do not live down here on this island, thank heaven! For I have no particular admiration for the country. I am simply spending a few weeks at Pine Glen, having been recommended to get out of the city and give over study for the time.

"I will not tell you much about myself, as that would bore you, and really has nothing to do with my story. I will simply say that until a week ago, I never met a girl with whom I could fall really and truly in love.

"I suppose every man meets the woman of his heart some time. I have met one who seemed the queen among girls, and I loved her passionately the first time my eyes rested on her glorious face.

"Do not think I am going to rave over her. You have not seen her, and I would not have your sympathy. I will spare you."

"Thanks," laughed the detective.

"This girl," Harold went on, not minding the interruption, "lives in that house of mystery. Every day she rides along the country roads with a black-faced old wretch—the creature who is known as Mr. Dundal Wombo."

"How I hate that old heathen! He is said to be very rich—in fact, to have so much money that he can do anything he likes. I do not know if this is true.

"I am a great rider myself, and I take a dash every morning on my favorite, which I brought down here with me. It was on one of these occasions I first saw Rana. Our eyes met, and I felt my heart thrill with a new joy.

"Then I inquired about her, and I was told by the people here to curb my curiosity, unless I wanted to get into trouble with Mr. Wombo, who resents any one taking interest in his affairs.

"I was told the girl is old Wombo's daughter, but I do not believe it. I am positive his blood does not flow in her veins. It is more than likely she is his captive. I know she stands in the greatest fear of him.

"They came here about a year ago, and Wombo bought that old stone house, which was built by a crazy man many years ago and had remained deserted for a long period.

"Wombo had a squad of black servants, and he is believed to be utterly unscrupulous and regardless of law. Many mysterious things have happened hereabouts since he located in the Old Fort, as the stone house has been called.

"This singular heathen has received a great deal of queer furniture into his home, and he has been known to take in huge cases and boxes at night. What these things contained can merely be surmised.

"For all of the warnings I received, I resolved to become acquainted with the beautiful girl whose glance had so quickened my blood.

"But how was I to accomplish this? That was a question that gave me a great deal of trouble. I pondered over it until I decided on boldly riding up and entering into conversation with them some time when they were out in company.

"But fate had something better in store for me. One day, as I was riding along the road, I heard a clatter of hoofs behind me, and, looking around, saw a runaway horse coming at a mad pace.

"On the horse's back was the girl I longed to know, and she had quite lost control of the animal. Dundal Wombo was not to be seen.

"It did not take me long to recover from my astonishment, and, as the runaway dashed past, I gave my horse the whip and was away in pursuit, calling for her to keep her seat and I would save her.

"It was a mad and furious ride, but I lashed my good horse unmercifully, finally overhauling the runaway. Just as I put out my hand to grasp the bridle of her animal, the creature swerved, and she was flung from the saddle.

"She struck heavily in the road, and, a moment later, I was kneeling beside her. Her eyes were closed, and she was unconscious—I thought dead.

"I cannot describe the grief that overcame me. I lifted her and bore her to a grassy bank by a brookside, where I laid her softly down. I laved her hands, calling on her to open her glorious eyes—to let me know she still lived. In my mad passion, I pressed kisses on her lips and held her close to my heart.

"I was kissing her thus when she opened her eyes and looked at me wonderingly. Abashed, I put her down gently, asking if she were hurt very bad.

"For some time, she made no reply, and I began to think she could not understand English. At length, however, she seemed to fully comprehend what had happened, and she asked me to aid her in sitting up.

"I might go into raptures over her voice, with its delightful foreign accent, but I spare you once more. Let it be enough to say she had not spoken three words before I knew I was hopelessly and eternally in love.

"I suppose you will think me a young fool. So be it! I do not care! Other men have been fools before me, and they have lived through it.

"She asked for Mr. Wombo. I had seen nothing of him. Then she said a dog had frightened both horses, and he had been thrown, while her animal ran away with her.

"She talked hurriedly, as if fearing he might appear any moment, and oh, how frank and refreshing she was! So unlike the girls I have known!

"She had seen me kissing her, and she was not offended, although she blushed furiously when she spoke of it. Then, in a mad moment, I told her I loved her. And she—well, she told me she had loved me the first time she saw me!

"You smile. Well, I expected you would feel that I must be a young idiot. No matter! You have not seen her!

"She told me she could not meet me ever again—said Wombo would be very angry if he ever knew what had passed between us. I could see she feared him. I swore he should not stand between us.

"Rana—that was the name she gave me—was completely won by my fierce manner of making love, and, as we stood there by the roadside, I made her promise to meet me inside the wall of the fort. I was to see her directly after nightfall this day. She warned me of the danger of coming there, but I would need no warning.

"Then I caught her in my arms, as we stood by the roadside, and pressed my lips to hers once more.

"At that very instant, Dundal Wombo, mounted on his recaptured horse, swept into view around a bend in the road. He saw me kiss Rana!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE FACE AT THE FANLIGHT.

HAROLD paused in the midst of his story, a queer smile playing about his handsome mouth, as if the memory of that discovery amused him for the moment. Then he suddenly became sober once more, going on:

"That discovery was most unfortunate for me—for Rana. The black devil was smooth as oil, but there was a terrible glitter in his beady eyes that told he would delight to fasten his fingers on my throat and never take them away until I ceased to breathe.

"When he had listened to Rana's story, which she hurriedly told him, he bowed very low before me, and thanked me a dozen times for what I had done.

"Not only that," Harold continued, flushing with sudden anger, "he offered to pay

me—he tried to make me take money. For all of his outward seeming of politeness, there was that in his manner that seemed to say he considered me no more than a common dog.

"I was tempted to give the old wretch a good shaking up, but I refrained, knowing it would be a foolish thing to do. Still, he saw I did not stand in awe of him, which cut him up to a great extent, as everything hereabouts are scared of the villain as if he were the foul fiend himself.

"He is very rich—has money to throw away. This money gives him a great deal of power. I have heard he was a prince in his own country, and that he was obliged to flee because of some great conspiracy against the English rulers. He tried to head another uprising of the natives against the English, but his plot failed.

"I do not know as this story is true, but, if it is not, I cannot understand why he should come here and buy the old fort. There is a great deal of mystery about the man.

"Well, old Wombo got Rana away as soon as possible, but, as she left me, I saw the promise repeated in her glorious eyes, and I knew she would meet me to-night if she possibly could.

"Need I tell you how eagerly I awaited the approach of the hour when I was to make the venture, dangerous though I knew it to be? I did not hesitate in the least, even though I knew I might be going to sudden death."

"That shows how much of a fool an apparently sensible man will be when he falls in love," observed the detective.

Harold flushed a bit, but forced a short laugh.

"I suppose you are right. Anyway, we will not disagree over that point.

"You know the remainder of my story as well as if I told it complete. I went to the Old Fort and found my way inside the wall, for all of the approaching storm, hoping Rana would meet me and, at least, make another appointment. I think old Wombo must have found out something about it, or, if nothing more, suspected. You know how you dropped in on my back and nearly crushed the life from my body.

"Now, I have told you my story complete, I trust you will relieve my curiosity as to the cause of your presence in that place. You must have had a reason for going there."

"I am not in the habit of doing anything aimlessly and without a purpose."

"Do not think I insinuated such a thing."

"I followed a man to the place."

"Followed a man there? For what purpose?"

"Well, I am a detective."

The young man started.

"A detective? And you shadowed a man to the Old Fort?"

"I did."

"What had he been doing?"

"He attempted to mutilate the corpse of Mr. Warren Trench."

Harold uttered an exclamation of horror.

"When?—where?"

"At Greenwood Cemetery. The coffin was opened there as they were about to bury the man. As the mourners gathered about, a dark-faced man darted forward, knife in hand, and attempted to mutilate the corpse."

"What could have been his object? Was he mad?"

"I do not think so."

"Then why such an attempt?"

"It seems the Thugs of India have a grudge against Trench, and—"

"But the man is dead! What more do they want?"

"To mutilate him."

This vindictiveness was more than Harold could understand, and he slowly shook his head.

"Such a thing is horrible, but is like those black wretches. You say the man came to the Fort?"

"Yes."

"Then it is probable he is one of Dundal Wombo's slaves, for the men who live with him in the Fort are no better than slaves. Wombo must have held a grudge against my uncle. It is probably an old affair. Although I never admired Warren Trench, I think more of him for having such an enemy."

"I was engaged by Mrs. Trench in guarding the body, and I took a fancy to trace down the fellow who tried to mutilate it."

"And that brought us together to-night?"

"Exactly."

"What will you do now?"

"Well, I have tumbled to several surprising things since taking hold of the matter, and I think I will follow it up."

"In what direction?"

"My curiosity is aroused. I am going to find what lays within the walls of the Fort."

"What? You will not dare—"

Fire-Eye flung out one hand with a gesture that checked the young man.

"You do not know me," he said quietly, and with no appearance of boasting. "Otherwise you would not say what I did not dare."

Harold looked abashed.

"I beg your pardon, sir; but you are dealing with a snake when you fool around Dundal Wombo."

"I am not in the habit of fooling around a great deal, and, as for snakes, I have handled a great many of them in my time."

"But this creature is venomous and most deadly."

"So much the better. It will simply make the matter all the more interesting. Before two more days have passed, perhaps even sooner, I propose to find a way to get inside the Fort."

"You will never come out alive."

"Perhaps not," gravely admitted the detective. "Still I am not an easy man to kill."

"Why should your duties as a detective take you in there?"

"Perhaps my duties do not absolutely require I should go in there, but I am a sort of freelance, for all of the fact that I am on the regular force, and I can never run against a mystery without feeling an overpowering impulse to solve it."

"I hope you may succeed in this case, but—Look there!"

Harold leaped to his feet, uttering the cry and pointing toward the firelight.

The detective looked up just in time to see a dusky face disappear from the transom.

"A spy!" exclaimed Fire-Eye, angrily.

"You are right!"

"Out—after him! Don't let him slip us!"

Prince leaped toward the door and tore it open. The corridor of the hotel was rather dark, and not a sign of a moving form could he see.

"A light!" cried Fire-Eye, bounding out into the passage. "Bring the lamp!"

Harold lost no time in obeying, but when the light was brought, they were not rewarded by seeing any one at hand.

"It was no fancy," asserted the young man. "What did you see?"

"A face—a dusky—dark—villainous face!"

"And so did I! There was an eavesdropper at the fanlight! But where has he vanished to?"

"He must be close at hand."

The detective darted along the corridor and dashed down the stairs, but he encountered no one. The eavesdropper had vanished in a most astonishing manner.

There was something very puzzling about it, for it certainly did not seem as if the person, whoever he was, had been given time to disappear thus completely after his face was seen at the fanlight.

"And it was one of those black whelps of Mr. Dundal Wombo's," muttered Prince, grimly. "In that case, the dark-faced terror of this section will soon know of my intention to visit him. All right. I'll go there, just the same."

Fire-Eye was not a man to be turned aside from a resolution because it would be extremely hazardous to carry out his purpose. He had never quailed at ordinary danger, and he was soon to be tried by peril of an extraordinary nature.

Out to the open air he proceeded, where he found the storm had passed, although the night was still dark and unpleasant. Away down in the southwest the thunder was muttering sullenly, and there was a harsh chill in the air.

Shivering a bit, he turned to re-enter the hotel.

Just then, a man came out of the night and hurried in by the door. Fire-Eye caught a

fair look at his face, repressing a faint exclamation of surprise.

It was Cockney Bob, the English crook!

CHAPTER XII.

THE MYSTERIOUS VOICE.

"HELLO!" muttered Fire-Eye. "What's that crook doing here, I wonder?"

His curiosity was aroused, and, after a moment he followed the Englishman into the hotel.

Through a partially open door, he could look into the bar-room, and he saw Cockney Bob hasten to meet a sullen-looking man, who was leaning against the bar.

"'Ello, Mike," saluted the man from London.

"Hello," growled the other. "You've got along at last, I see, though it took you a long time."

"The bloomin' storm kept me back, don't you see?"

"Well, I didn't know you was skeered of gettin' wet a bit. You ain't sugar ner salt, an' there wasn't no danger you'd melt. You wants to keep hunk with The Clincher by bein' round on the time set, else I gives yer th' shake—see?"

"You can't afford to give me the shake now, hold boy," was the confident retort.

"Why not?"

"You know."

Then the two rascals looked at each other in a most mysterious manner, afterward getting their heads together and speaking in subdued tones.

"This is interesting," thought the detective outside the door. "There's something up. I wonder what?"

He would have given a great deal had he been able to hear the conversation between the two scoundrels, but that was impossible, and, after some moments spent in watching them, he ascended the stairs.

Above, Harold met him in the passage.

"Find anything?" eagerly asked the young man.

"No. The eavesdropper seemed to melt into thin air. I cannot understand how he vanished so quickly."

"I can."

"How?"

"Come. I will show you."

The detective followed his companion down the passage until the door of the room they had occupied, which was still standing wide open, was reached.

Then Harold's hand fell on the knob of the door directly opposite that one.

"Look here."

The door opened at his touch.

"What of it?" questioned Prince, on whom a light had dawned. "Do you think—"

"The man went in here—exactly that."

"Then where is he now?"

Harold quickly secured the light and led the way into the room. The detective entered with his fingers grasping the butt of his ready revolver, determined not to be taken off his guard.

The room was empty, save for a wretched bed, a stand and a broken chair.

"He is not here?" questioned Prince.

"No."

"Then where—"

"Look at the window."

It was standing wide open.

In a moment, Fire-Eye was at the open window, looking out. He discovered a sloping roof directly beneath, and everything seemed clear to him then.

"The eavesdropper must have darted in here and escaped by this window, sliding down the roof to the ground."

Harold nodded.

"That is what I believe."

"Then he is safely out of the way by this time."

"Yes."

"That is unfortunate."

"You are right."

Something in the young man's tone caused Prince to scan his face eagerly, and he saw Harold was very pale.

"What is the matter?" questioned the detective. "You look broken up, man."

"I am sorry that creature got away."

"So am I, but it will do no harm in particular."

The other shook his head.

"I fear it will do a great deal of harm," he said, soberly.

"How?"

"Did you not notice the face at the fanlight?"

"Yes."

"Was it not dark—forbidding—ominous?"

"Yes—decidedly."

"With burning eyes?"

"I noticed the eyes in particular."

"The face and eyes of Dundal Wombo's chosen servant and companion."

"You think that?"

"I am sure of it."

"Then—"

"Then you had better change your mind about visiting the Fort, if you have the least desire to live."

For some moments they looked into each other's eyes, neither speaking another word. At length, the detective slowly observed:

"I shall not change my mind."

"Then you are as good as a dead man! Wombo will be prepared for your coming, and it makes me shudder to think of the fate that will, without doubt, be yours."

"I begin to believe more than ever before it is my duty to go there, and I shall go. If this man is such a fearful creature, I do not understand how you can rest until you have rescued the girl you love from him."

"I do not propose to rest, but I shall not ruin all hope of success by rashness. He has not harmed her as yet, and I do not believe he will, even though his eavesdropping spy tells him of the understanding between Rana and myself."

At this moment a door was heard to slam beneath them, and the muffled sound of voices came to their ears. Both stood still and listened, but the words were rather indistinct.

"Some people have entered the room below," said Harold, in a guarded tone.

Fire-Eye held up one hand, with a cautioning gesture.

"Sh!" he whispered. "I believe I recognize those voices. There must be an opening in the floor somewhere. Carry that lamp from the room."

Young Trench obeyed, taking the lamp to the room they had lately occupied.

When he returned, he found Prince on his knees in one corner, with his eye to the floor, just where a ray of light came up through a wide crack. Harold advanced cautiously to the ferret's side, whispering:

"Who are they?"

"Two crooks," was the reply of Fire-Eye, who could look down on Cockney Bob and The Clincher, who were seated at a table in the room below, a bottle of whisky between them. "Be quiet. I can understand what they are saying."

"Then we'll work this game together, Clincher," said Cockney Bob, as if they had settled on something. "The hold girl will ave to come down right 'andy with the stuff."

"Why shouldn't she," growled the other crook, in his sullen way. "Time was when London Bess was doin' the panel racket. Then we was her pals. Now she has fell inter dead loads of richness, she's got ter divvy, fer we're onto her."

"Sure as you live, hold boy. She oughter know we can throw her cold hif she don't do the right thing."

"She does know it, you bet. It was by her advice I got out of town an' sneaked down here. She was skeered."

"Of what?"

"The cops."

"Of the police? Well, I don't see what that 'ad to do with you comin' down 'ere."

"She was afraid I'd be pulled an' blow."

"Oh! Hand she paid you to get hout?"

"Sure."

"What do you think was the matter with that hold duffer hof 'er's?"

"Well," replied The Clincher, in a very mysterious manner, "I think as how he dosed hisself."

"Poison?"

"That's what."

"Why?"

"Well, he was scared inter killin' hisself."

The English crook looked at his companion in wonder, as if he did not fully understand the meaning of those words.

"'Ow can a bloke be scared into killin' himself?"

"That's the mystery. He had enemies as was enough to scare a man crazy. Mebbe he was crazy."

"He must 'ave been."

"Well, one thing is sure: He's dead an' out of the way."

Then, to the amazement and horror of the two crooks, a strange, hollow voice was heard to say:

"You fools! Warren Trench is not dead! He still lives, but he is doomed—doomed!"

CHAPTER XIII.

INTO THE TIGER'S LAIR.

COCKNEY BOB and Clincher Mike started to their feet, their faces pale and terrified, as they stared about the room in search of the mysterious person who had uttered those blood-chilling words.

"Who spoke?" gasped Mike.

"Where is the bloomin' duifer?" exclaimed Bob.

There was no reply to these questions, and the precious pair began searching the room.

They found nothing to reward them for their trouble, and they finally paused to stare into each other's eyes in a way that showed how their superstitious fears had been preyed upon.

"Hi don't propose to stay in this room hany longer, pal," declared the English crook.

"Nor I," nodded Mike. "Let's get out right away. Some cove has been listenin'."

Without delay, the two desperate crooks hurried from the room, taking the light with them.

They were scarcely less puzzled than the detective who had been listening at the crack in the room of the floor above, for Fire-Eye had not the least idea from whence the mysterious voice issued or who was the author of the singular words which had so alarmed the crooks.

When the men were gone, the detective told Harold what had passed in the room below, and the young man listened with the greatest interest.

"It must have been the trick of a practical joker to frighten those scoundrels," he said.

Fire-Eye shook his head, doubtfully.

"I don't know about that. There is a strange mystery about this entire affair. It is really baffling, but I mean to probe to the bottom of it."

"I wish you success."

"I will succeed if such a thing is possible. My curiosity is aroused, and I mean to satisfy it, whether such a procedure is business or not. You say Warren Trench hated your father?"

"Yes; at least, so I have been told."

"When did your father go to India?"

"He went the first time when I was very young—not more than two years old."

"Then he went there twice?"

"Yes. He made all his money in that heathen country."

"And the second time—"

"He did not return."

"Warren Trench was in India at that time?"

"He was."

"You say he hated your father?"

"With an undying hatred. I have been told he even made threats against the life of his brother Milton."

"Milton was your father's first name?"

"Yes."

"Do you know how your father died?"

"I have never been able to learn the full particulars; but his death was sudden and mysterious."

The two men looked silently into each other's eyes for some moments, and then Fire-Eye ventured another question:

"Have you ever thought—"

To be interrupted by Harold: "I have thought a great many things which I have not ventured to express. It has been my intention to probe the mystery when I had the opportunity, but I knew not exactly how to go about it. Now that Warren Trench is dead, I may abandon the idea entirely."

The young man's words were so significant their meaning could not be misunderstood.

After a few moments more of conversation Fire-Eye and Harold descended the stairs. They were just in time to see two men

leaving the hotel:—Cockney Bob and The Clincher.

"Wonder where those rascals are going at this hour?" muttered the tireless ferret.

"I have a fancy to follow them."

He quickly decided to do so, and a moment later he slipped out of the house.

The thunder was no longer muttering in the distance, but a mass of ragged clouds had covered the sky, so the night was now dark and chill, with an unpleasant dampness in the air.

Prince looked around for his men, but could see nothing of them.

"That is queer," he thought. "Wonder where they have gone so suddenly?"

Without delay, he hurried round the corner, prepared for a trap, in case the crooks suspected they were shadowed and should be lying in ambush.

But he encountered no ambush, and he saw nothing of the men he had intended to follow.

"They suspected—they have slipped away!" he exclaimed, in disappointment.

"What wretched luck!"

He moved about the buildings in search for Bob and Mike, thinking they might be lurking near under some handy cover.

All at once, he paused and crouched close to the ground, for he saw a shadowy form that glided from a shed and moved away into the gloom.

"Who is it? One of my men? I'll follow and see."

Then Fire-Eye, with all the caution and skill he could command, began the task of tracking the unknown through the night.

It was a most difficult matter, but the ferret did not hesitate, and he pursued the man steadily, as that individual made his way from the hotel.

There was something about the movements of the unknown that soon convinced Prince he was neither Cockney Bob nor Clincher Mike.

Who was he?

That Fire Eye determined to know before he gave over the pursuit. The person's movements had seemed singular and suspicious, for he had been sneaking around the hotel in a stealthy manner.

To the surprise of the ferret, the shadowed stranger made his way directly toward the house of mystery, Dundal Wombo's home—the old stone Fort!

"I have it!" was the softly whispered exclamation that finally broke from the lips of Prince Bruce. "This is the spy—the owner of the face we saw at the fanlight!"

Straight to the Fort proceeded the man, and a signal admitted him beyond the wall, while Fire-Eye was left outside.

"Little good this has done me!" thought the detective. "I have had my trouble for nothing."

He did not fancy the idea of returning to the hotel then, and it was not long before a daring scheme entered his head.

"Why not scale the wall again and try to get in there this night?" was the question he asked himself. "They will not be expecting me. Even though this man I followed was the spy of the fanlight, his warning will not put Wombo on guard for the present, as no one can imagine I would venture coming here again this night."

He was not inclined to spend much time in speculation, after deciding on a move, and within a few moments, he had again found a way to scale the wall and drop on the other side, trusting to fortune to find a course out of the trap.

The darkness of the night was favorable to his daring project, and, as soon as he paused to consider the lay of the land, he began creeping like a cat along the base of the wall. His revolver was ready for instant use, in case it should be needed, as he knew not what moment he should be engaged in a desperate struggle for life.

As he approached the gate in the wall, he redoubled his caution, and he soon located the sentinel, who stood grim and motionless by the stone barrier.

"Wonder if he has the keys to the Fort?" thought Fire-Eye, as he watched the statue-like figure. "If I thought so, I would attempt to obtain them now."

As he crouched there, a dark figure came round the corner of the stone house and approached the sentry. A low hail and an-

sver were exchanged, following which the men stood close together and conversed in tones which did not reach the detective's ears with anything like distinctness.

"He came from the other side of the house," thought Prince. "I wonder if he is another sentinel? If so, what does he guard?"

Without pausing for further speculation, he slipped back along the wall and soon reached a position where he could dart to the cover of the house. In a short time he was posted on the back side of the building, where he discovered another door.

He did not wait long before, with the silent tread of a panther, a form came around the corner.

Fire-Eye held his breath and waited, half expecting discovery.

The man moved straight to the back door of the house, and the detective heard the rattle of keys.

This person was about to unlock the door.

Prince did not hesitate, for he realized his time had come, and, with the revolver grasped in his firm grip, he darted on the other, clutching at that person's throat.

The man with the keys felt iron fingers close on his windpipe, and the old muzzle of a revolver was pressed against one temple. In his ear a voice hissed:

"An outcry—a word—a whisper, and I will drop you cold!"

No outcry was made, and there was no struggle, for the man seemed completely taken by surprise.

With swiftness and skill, Fire-Eye twisted the fellow's hands back, and—click! click!—they were fastened with bands of steel.

"March!"

The ferret had wheeled his captive squarely around, and he now forced him toward the wall at the back of the house. No resistance was made, but, to make doubly sure there should not be an outcry, Prince whispered:

"Keep still and you will not be harmed; make an outcry and you die!"

The wall was reached, and there Fire-Eye forced his captive down, whipping out a gag and fastening it in the man's mouth with a rapidity that was little short of marvelous.

"I am going into that house," came sibilantly from the dauntless ferret's lips; "and I must fix you so you will not trouble me. I'll have to truss you up pretty securely, but you need not worry, as I will find a way to set you free after I come out."

Being always prepared for such emergencies, Prince soon produced some stout cords, with which the captive was secured so he could scarcely wriggle.

"There, I fancy you will be safe for the present, my friend. Just try to take it as coolly as you can, and let it go at that. I will see you later."

The detective had secured the bunch of keys, and he now approached the back door. By a rare chance, the first key he tried fitted the lock.

The door swung open noiselessly, and he entered.

He had ventured into the tiger's lair!
Would he ever come forth alive?

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SLEEPING BEAUTY.

FIRE-EYE softly closed the heavy door behind him, but he did not lock it, thinking he might find it needful to retreat with such precipitation there would be no time to fit a key and throw back the bolt.

A dim light showed that he was in a long narrow passage that seemed to lead from the back of the house to the front. This passage was perfectly bare and unfurnished.

Listening closely, Fire-Eye could hear no sound. The old stone house seemed deserted.

"Wonder if Mr. Dundal Wombo and his satellites are astir at this hour?" thought the daring detective. "If they are, they want to keep shy of me, for I'm not to be monkeyed with to-night."

Like a creeping cat, he stole down the passage, every sense alert for any danger that might come suddenly upon him. His

fancy pictured lurking thugs and assassins in the shadowy corners, but still he did not hesitate.

Doors opened to the right and left on either hand. He tried several of them, but they were securely locked.

"Suppose the keys would admit me," thought Prince; "but I don't care to be rattling them around at this hour. Such a noise—"

He caught his breath, listening with his heart in his mouth, for a strange and blood-chilling sound reached his ears, seeming to come from beneath his feet. It was like a groaning roar, dying away into a peevish whine.

"Great Scott!" mentally exclaimed Fire-Eye. "What was that? Blamed if I didn't think it was an earthquake at first!"

He kept perfectly still, listening for any further sounds, expecting the noise would arouse the inmates of the place. In this he was happily disappointed, for all remained silent within the strange house, as if the inmates were accustomed to what had startled the intrusive detective.

Prince breathed with greater freedom after a time, but he still wondered what the singular noise could have been.

Slowly he progressed the length of the passage, discovering some stairs at the front of the house.

"There doesn't seem to be anything down here," he thought, halting at the foot of the stairs. "I wonder what I could find above?"

He did not hesitate long. Unless he found something more than he had already discovered, his visit to the Old Fort would prove fruitless, and he was not given to wasting his time.

"I'm going up."

Up he went, every sense on the alert, ready to defend himself in a moment, if he were attacked.

After that singular roar from the cellar, the house was so quiet that a noise of some kind would have been welcomed with relief by Prince Bruce. The silence seemed ominous.

A feeling of awe any mystery that he had never before experienced crept over the daring detective—a strange chill that clogged the blood in his veins seemed to retard the regular beating of his heart.

Once or twice, he made an effort to throw off the singular feeling, being angry at himself for such folly as he considered it; but the efforts were vain, and the feeling grew stronger with each passing moment that he remained beneath that roof.

The head of the stairs was reached, and there Fire-Eye again paused to listen.

Silence.

"The place seems deserted," thought the detective. But he knew well enough the house was inhabited, and that he might find himself in deadly peril at any instant.

It was darker in the upper part of the Old Fort, and Prince was forced to proceed with greater caution.

At length, he came to a door through the key-hole of which shone a tiny pencil of light.

"Wonder what's in there?" was the ferret's mental question.

Down on one knee he sunk, and his eye was applied to the key-hole. After a bit, he found himself peering into a furnished room, but he could see very little to reward him for his trouble.

For some seconds he was doubtful concerning the course he would pursue, but he finally resolved to try the door.

Without making the least noise, he placed his hand on the knob and slowly turned it. The act was accomplished with the greatest skill, and it proved successful.

The door swung open a hair at a time until he could obtain a fair view of the interior of the room. Then he stood lost in admiration of what he saw.

The room was furnished in truly Oriental luxuriance, and the air was laden with a faint, pleasant perfume. On a soft couch lay a girl of great beauty, her closed eyes and regular breathing telling she was asleep. She was fully dressed in loose garments which fell about her exquisite figure in a manner that betrayed its perfect contour. That her dreams were pleasant seemed evident from the fact that she was smiling faintly.

For some moments the daring detective stood spellbound by admiration and wonder, and then, all at once, he knew whom he had discovered.

"It is Rana!" was his thought.

Then he understood why Harold Trench had fallen in love with this strange girl, concerning whom he knew so little, for she was beautiful enough to win the love of any impressionable young man.

He felt that he must withdraw, as that was the only course open to a gentleman, and yet he could not bring himself to the point of retreating immediately. His eyes told him the room was not the sleeping chamber of the beautiful girl; but he saw some portieres at an arch that evidently led into an adjoining apartment.

"She sleeps there," was his thought. "Why has she not retired at this hour?"

A sudden sound caused him to turn his head like a flash and look down the hall.

A ray of light shone out, indicating a door was being opened.

Some one was about to step out into the hall, and he was in the gravest peril of being discovered!

He did not hesitate about his course of action.

Immediately he stepped lightly into the room where the sleeping girl lay, closing the door behind him. He did this with a skill and silence that was all the more remarkable because of its swiftness.

Then he leaned against the door and listened.

It seemed that he heard soft footsteps pass the door and sink to silence.

"Harold!"

The girl was murmuring in her dreams!

With his back against the door, Fire-Eye gazed at her again, wondering who she could be and why she was living there in the old stone house that was the home of a mysterious dark-faced heathen like Dundal Wombo.

The girl fascinated him.

"I would give anything to know her history," he thought. "There is a strange mystery connected with her, I am sure."

Again he fancied he heard pattering footsteps outside the door, and he half-expected some one would attempt to enter, for which reason he clutched his revolver and prepared to meet the emergency.

"I'll give them a merry time, if they do come!" were the words which flashed through his brain.

Again he listened, but he heard nothing. This time the pattering footsteps had not passed on, and he wondered if some dark-faced Hindoo were crouching outside, ready to leap on him the instant that the door was opened.

"I am going to have a hot time of it before I get out of here," decided Fire-Eye. "I can feel it in my bones. It was easy enough to get in, but it is pretty sure to be different about getting out."

Feeling it would be best to remain quiet for a time, he looked for some means of securing the door, discovering the key hung to a chain that dangled from the lock.

It was not a very easy task to insert the key in the lock and throw the bolt without making a noise, but he succeeded in doing so.

Then the detective breathed easier, once more turning to admire the sleeping girl, who now moved restlessly on the couch, the smile having vanished from her face, which, however, was still beautiful.

"Her dreams are not so pleasant as they were," thought the intruder. "I wonder if instinct warns her there is an invader here."

As he watched her, she began to mutter, and a sudden fear assailed him.

"She is awakening!"

With the step of a cat, he darted to the side of the couch.

Just in time!

Her eyes unclosed at the very instant when his fingers were pressed over her lips.

In her ear he whispered:

"I am a friend! Do not make an outcry!"

But, for all this warning, he saw she was on the point of screaming or speaking aloud, and he hastened to add:

"I am Harold's friend. Trust me; be silent!"

Those words saved him, for a light of understanding entered her glorious midnight eyes, and she gently drew his hands from her lips, whispering in return:

"Harold's friend? How did you come here?"

"I cannot explain all that now. I think there is some one listening at the door."

She sat up and looked at him wonderfully, plainly marveling at his presence in that house of mystery.

Now she was awake, the detective realized she was more beautiful than she had been asleep, and he no longer wondered that a bright young man of Harold Trench's caliber had fallen in love with her at first sight.

She spoke English perfectly, but her whisper had betrayed a trace of an accent that made her words sound all the more delightful.

"How could you get in here?" she persisted. "How did you come in this room? The door—"

"Was not locked."

She looked startled.

"I thought I locked it fast."

"If you did, some one unlocked it."

"That does not explain how you entered the house. Oh, what peril you have run! You will be killed! You will be—"

Cutting her short, there came a heavy knocking on the door, followed by a hoarse voice crying out some words in a language the detective did not understand!

CHAPTER XV.

THE COIL OF THE CORD.

STARTLED, stricken motionless and dumb, the detective and girl stared at each other, white-faced.

Who was at the door?

Fire-Eye knew well enough it was a deadly foe, for he could have no friends among the black-faced men in that house of mystery.

The girl trembled.

"We are lost!" she whispered. "If you are found here, they will kill you, and I shall be fearfully punished!"

Prince Bruce looked at his revolver in a significant way, as if to say his foes would have a warm time capturing him.

The girl attempted to rise, but seemed overcome by weakness, for she sunk back on the couch, her bosom heaving tumultuously.

If she feared to such an extent these strange men among whom she lived, they must be fierce and terrible indeed.

"They will not take us alive!" softly grated Fire-Eye. "I hold six lives in my hand, and I can make every bullet count!"

Again came the heavy knock on the door; again the imperious voice cried out in the tongue Prince did not understand.

"It is Mahoor," came faintly from the girl. "I fear he saw you as you came in here!"

She seemed to fling off her weakness, for she suddenly arose to her feet and started to advance toward the door.

Fire-Eye caught her by the arm.

"What would you do?" was his demand. "Do you mean to give me up?"

She turned her dark eyes on him in reproach.

"You claim to be Harold's friend," was her retort. "I love him! Is not that enough?"

He could not misunderstand her meaning, for there was a suppressed passion in her words and an intense earnestness that was very impressive. The young man had made no mistake; this strange girl loved him as greatly as he loved her.

"Do you mean to open the door?"

The reproach in her eyes was mingled with indignation.

"Do not think I am so foolish!"

"What do you mean to do?"

"You shall see. I will try to send him away—I will lie."

His hand fell from her arm, just as the knocking was renewed. To the door went the girl, calling out sharply, at which the clamoring ceased, and the man outside made another demand.

The detective stood still and listened to what followed, hearing a conversation he could not understand. The girl spoke in a happy tone, as if she had just been awakened,

and, from the inflection of her voice, Prince made out she was reproaching the knocker for disturbing her.

After some moments, the man outside went away, and the girl came back to Fire-Eye, a look of intense relief on her beautiful hand.

"You deceived him?" questioned Prince.

"I hope so," was the reply. "Mahoor is very shrewd and suspicious. It is not an easy thing to fool him."

"Who is he?"

"The Tiger's trusted servant!"

"The Tiger?"

"Yes."

"Who is the Tiger?"

"Here he is known as Dundal Wombo."

"Hai! In India he is called the Tiger?"

"Yes; or the Tiger Rajah."

"He is a Rajah?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did you deceive Mahoor?"

"Pretended his knocking had awakened me, and was angry that he should presume to rap on my door at such an hour."

"Why did he knock?"

"Said he thought he saw me come into the room."

Fire-Eye looked anxious.

"In that case, he must have seen me."

"Perhaps he caught a glimpse of you."

"Is he shrewd, as well as suspicious?"

"Very."

"Then I fear we have not seen the last of him. You should have told him you were astir, for you might have explained what he saw—or fancied he saw."

Rana's face was very grave, and she remained silent for some moments after this, finally nodding.

"You are right," was her confession. "I made a mistake, but we will trust his suspicions were allayed. Heaven pity you, if you are found! Why did you come here?"

Her distress was genuine, and his pity for her was aroused, for he could see he had placed her in grave peril.

"I came to learn the truth about Dundal Wombo," was his bold answer.

"Why should you expose yourself to such peril to learn what even his friends have never discovered?"

"It is my duty."

"Duty?"

"Yes."

"I do not understand you."

"I am a detective."

Her face cleared, but she shrunk away, as if he had aroused either fear or aversion by the statement.

"A detective? I know what you are—I have been told. If you are found here, you die!"

"Perhaps not. I am a hard man to kill. Now, I am here, you can tell me much. Why is the Tiger Rajah in America? What is he doing here?"

She shook her head.

"I have sworn never to reveal those secrets of his which I happen to know. I cannot tell you."

"Tell me one thing: How is he connected with Warren Trench? for I know there is a connection between the two men."

An inscrutable look settled on the face of the beautiful girl, as if bidding defiance to his eyes, which were now searching her keenly, and she shook her head.

"My lips are sealed."

"Then tell me what Dundal Wombo is to you. Although you are dark, I feel sure the man cannot be a relative."

"Perhaps you are right—perhaps not. Anyway, he is the best friend I have in all the world, although I fear him."

"Why do you fear him?"

"Who does not fear the Tiger?"

"He has power over you?"

"He has power over every one who have anything to do with him."

"He is not your father?"

"No."

"What is your name?"

"Rana."

"Your full name?"

"Rana Trench."

The detective started, as if he had been shot, his face growing pale.

The girl saw his emotion, and she made haste to ask:

"What is the matter? What is there about my name to make you look like that?"

Instead of replying, Fire-Eye hoarsely but guardedly asked:

"Did you tell Harold your full name?"

"He did not ask it."

"Your father—who was he?"

"The half-brother of this Warren Trench, of whom you spoke—Milton Trench?"

Fire-Eye could scarcely repress his consternation, but he had been schooled to command his features, and, after that first start, he did not further betray himself.

He was sorry for Harold. This beautiful girl whom the young man loved and wished to make his wife was really his own sister!

The detective did not know the history of Milton Trench, so he could not then determine if Rana was a legitimate daughter of the man who had met a mysterious fate in the strange land of the East. It was possible Trench had possessed a wife in the United States at the time Rana was born, but Prince Bruce did not wish to think Harold's father such a villain.

That he was obtaining further points on the mysterious Warren Trench case Fire-Eye was certain, and he confessed to himself that it was surely puzzling and complicated.

He could understand in a measure the feelings of Harold and Rana when they discovered the relation existing between them selves, and he knew the young man would be nearly crushed.

The detective was about to question the girl further, when she caught hold of him, whispering excitedly:

"Be silent!"

They were still, but Prince could hear nothing.

"What is it?" he finally questioned.

"I am sure I heard a movement in my chamber!" she whispered, her eyes staring toward the portieres.

"Nonsense!" returned the ferret, after a time. "Your nerves are unstrung, Miss Trench."

She shook her head, choking as she returned:

"I am not easily deceived about anything of the sort."

"You were this time. Shall I enter the chamber to convince you no one is there?"

"Dare you?"

He smiled, as he replied:

"Remain here. You shall see."

Straight to the portieres he advanced, flinging them aside with a sweep of his hand.

Something whisped through the air and coiled about his neck! He was blinded by a glare of light and hurled violently to the floor, the shock of his fall stunning him somewhat. Then came the horrible strangling sensation he had once before experienced—the sensation that robbed him of his great strength and rendered him helpless as a child. His fingers clutched wildly, feebly at the thing twined so tightly about his neck.

It was a silken cord!

CHAPTER XVI.

FIRE-EYE'S FATE.

Fire-Eye made a feeble attempt to defend himself, but he had been attacked in such a manner he was given very little chance.

For the second time he felt the cord of the strangler robbing him of strength and life.

Through a black haze he saw dusky faces bending over him—heard a woman's scream—knew others were struggling.

That was all.

Later, when he came to himself, he was alone in the darkness.

It was some little time before he could remember what had happened, but it all came to him at length, and he knew he had fallen into the hands of enemies who would have no more regard for his life than if he were the meanest mongrel cur alive.

After a time, he discovered he was not bound, greatly to his relief.

"I can make some kind of a battle with my bare hands," was his thought. And then, as he remembered how easily he had been overcome by the aid of the strangler's deadly instrument, a groan was wrung from his lips.

Thinking it all over, he realized these Thugs were the most dangerous human beings with whom he had ever dealt. Never

before had he been thus readily overcome; but now he was actually losing confidence in himself.

As soon as he could do so, he started to get up. To his dismay, his head struck violently against something, and he was knocked back to the ground, on which he had been lying.

He put up his hand and felt a stone ceiling close above.

"That is pleasant," was his grim comment. "It's plain they don't mean that I shall stand up and stretch myself."

On his hands and knees, he crept about the place, discovering he was in a small dungeon, with walls of stone on every hand. At one side he found an iron grating through which air was admitted to the place.

The detective did not feel very cheerful after making the survey.

"It's plain they have chucked me in here to stay," he muttered. "I can't seem to find any door to the place."

Through the grating came a smell as of some wild animal, and once, from a distance, he heard a muttering roar that reminded him of the sound that had startled him when he first entered the house of mystery.

But the caged detective had few thoughts for anything but his own wretched plight.

What was to be the end of the adventure?

He wondered why the stranglers had not finished the job when he lay unconscious in their power.

Why was he spared?

It is impossible to describe what Prince Bruce endured during the dreary hours that followed. He lost all idea of time, for the hours seemed like days, and he began to fancy he had been confined there for months.

It was by the exercise of his wonderful will that he kept himself from becoming a raving maniac.

Three times food was thrust through the grating by some one he could not see. He called to this person, but there was no reply, save the soft sound of retreating footsteps, which died out in the distance.

With his bare hands he worked at the walls and grating, but there was little hope of escape in such a manner—no hope, in fact.

He ate the food, which was not so very bad, for he wished to keep up his strength. If an opportunity ever came, he meant to make one mad battle for life.

His hope was that young Trench, knowing what had become of him, would find means to get into the old house and save him from the dark-faced Thugs.

Where was Dundal Wombo, the Tiger?

Had that mysterious being condemned him to a living death in the cramped dungeon where he was now confined?

It seemed so.

In his sleep he heard the muttering roar, echoing through the under-ground retreat, and cold drops of sweat broke out on his face.

He had not meant to sleep, but exhausted nature overcame him, though the most horrible dreams gave him little genuine rest.

Where was Rana?

She must know of his fate. Could she do nothing to save him? Had she also met some horrible punishment at the hands of the dusky demons?

Twice he slept, and the second time he awoke to find himself once more helpless in the hands of his captors. He was being dragged from the dungeon, bound securely, hands and feet.

"Great Heaven!" thought the unfortunate ferret. "They have secured me while I slept, and I cannot make the least resistance! Now, I suppose, they mean to finish me."

For all of what he had passed through, he resolved to show the wretches how a man could die.

The satellites of Dundal Wombo carried Fire-Eye through a passage, one man going on in advance and bearing a light over his head.

Again the muttering roar was heard in the distance, but none of the men paid any attention to it.

Up a flight of stairs the detective was borne, and, for all of his condition, he drew a long breath of relief when he found himself out of the cellar.

The dark men took him into a bare room and cast him down on the stone floor, as if

he had been some inanimate bundle, after which they left him there.

"What next?" thought Prince.

He was not long left in suspense.

Two of the men returned, and the cords about his feet were cut, after which he was stood upright and marched through an open door. He advanced boldly and as steadily as possible to find himself in the presence of—

The Tiger Rajah!

CHAPTER XVII.

FACING THE TIGER.

FIRE-EYE knew the man was the Tiger the moment he saw him. There was no reason for doubt.

Dundal Wombo was reported to be a quiet little yellow-faced man with dark eyes, in no way given to display. Outside the Fort it was not generally known in the locality that he was an Indian Rajah.

This same little man now lay idly back amid soft cushions on a raised divan, attired in the most gorgeous robes of crimson, purple and gold, his entire person glittering with precious gems.

The sight was intended to overcome the wretched detective with awe, but Prince half-smiled, readily understanding the effort that had been made to stun him with this brilliant splendor.

The room was fitted up magnificently after the Oriental manner, with soft mattings and skins of wild animals on the floor, so the feet of those who passed over them made no sound.

The rich silk and plush hangings of the room were of a pale blue, and all were illuminated by a strong light that shifted every few moments in color, being white when the captive entered, but changing to pink, golden, purple—a dozen different colors, each color producing a new effect.

Mr. Dundal Wombo, as the Tiger Rajah, was lazily smoking a cigarette, with two dusky-faced attendants standing up stiffly at either side of the divan, a little in the rear.

As the detective was led before this strange man, the cigarette was daintily poised, and the Indian monarch regarded his prisoner with a slight show of interest and curiosity.

Fire-Eye returned the scrutiny fairly, not in the least abashed, although he was rather wretched and woebegone in appearance.

The detective's escorts bowed low before the Tiger Rajah, who waved his hand in a commanding way, and they immediately fell back a step, leaving Prince standing there alone, his feet free, but his hands bound at his back.

"Well," spoke the man on the divan, after a time, his voice soft and rather musical, "you have thrust yourself into a rather bad scrape, my friend."

His words were uttered with as little accent as those of Rana, somewhat to the surprise of Fire-Eye, who calmly returned:

"I have been in as bad scrapes as this many times, my man."

The Tiger's teeth came together with a click, and a dark look settled on his face, plainly telling he did not like this familiar mode of address.

"Have a care!" he sternly warned. "I am ruler here, and you had better treat me as such."

Prince smiled.

"You may rule your own minions, but you do not rule me, Mr. Dundal Wombo," was his quiet but bold retort.

The Indian had straightened up on the divan, his listlessness vanishing before the calmness of the man he had expected to cringe and cower in his presence.

"To the people of this wretched country I am Dundal Wombo—Mr. Dundal Wombo. In my own country I am Jaipur, the Tiger Rajah, a man before whom common dogs bow and cringe. I have so much wealth I do as I please, and no hand can stay me."

The detective actually had the audacity to smile at this statement.

"That may go in India," he said; "but you will find it won't work in this country."

"Why not?"

"The first thing you know, you will find yourself in the grasp of the law."

"The law!" came contemptuously from

the Tiger's lips. "What care I for the law of your wretched land! The law! Gold will break the grip of the law any time!"

"You think so."

"I know it."

"How?"

"You are a detective—a representative of the law! Bah! You are dust in my hands!"

"In that you are slightly off, Mr. Dundal Wombo. The outrages you have heaped on me are sure to be avenged."

"How?"

"That you will soon learn."

"How? You crept like a thief into my house. Every man has a right to protect himself from thieves, even in this miserable country. That is a part of your law."

"You know I am no thief."

"Perhaps I know it; but why should I confess as much? I am not supposed to know it. I kill you as I would any other thief. What can they do?"

"Try you for murder."

The Indian lay back amid the cushions and laughed icily.

"Try me! That would be a spectacle! Try the Tiger Rajah for murder! Ha! ha! ha! In Rajputana I have struck a slave to the heart for accidentally dropping my cloak as he was about to place it on my shoulders. Try me for murder, indeed!"

"You are not in Rajputana. This is the State of New York, where such an act would bring you to the chair of the executioner, even though you possessed the wealth of Monte Cristo and spent every dollar to save yourself."

"Really you make me tremble!" came scornfully from the Rajah's lips. "You hope to frighten me into sparing you. Paugh! If I took a fancy to draw my knife across your throat, I would give the signal, you would be thrown helpless to the floor, and then—" He ended by making certain movements to illustrate how the job would be finished.

If this singular man hoped to shake the ferret's nerves in the least by simple words and gestures, he was disappointed, for Fire-Eye showed not a particle of fear.

"You talk like a child," almost sneered the detective. "It shows how little you understand what result must surely follow such an act."

Mr. Dundal Wombo showed his white-even teeth in a devilish lifting of his upper lip, while a thoroughly evil light gleamed from his small eyes. In that moment Fire-Eye fancied he understood how this mysterious person came to be called the Tiger Rajah.

The ferret had no hope of intimidating such a man, but he knew the only course was to show not a sign of fear, for fear must arouse the contempt of the Indian.

Some moments of silence followed, during which the two eyed each other steadily, neither flinching.

Finally Wombo lifted the cigarette, only to discover it had gone out.

With an angry exclamation, he flung it from him, at the same time giving a pull at a cord that dangled within easy reach.

Immediately a black servant came swiftly into the apartment and bowed low before his master. No word was spoken, but more cigarettes were produced, one was selected, and the servant lighted and held a match until the weed was drawing properly. Then this slave, whose single duty seemed to be to supply his master when that mighty person wished to smoke, glided softly from the room.

The Tiger lay back amid the cushions, pulling lazily at the cigarette, watching the blue smoke drift upward and dissolve into gray and from that to nothingness. He seemed to have forgotten the man who was standing before him.

The two guards were rigid and moveless as statues.

Fire-Eye waited patiently, knowing the time would come when this strange man must speak.

From the depths beneath the house came the muttering roar once more, and the Tiger Rajah smiled a bit as he heard it, but it was not a pleasant smile.

"That is my pet," he observed. "You shall see him by and by."

The words were uttered significantly, and

Prince felt an involuntary shiver run over him.

"First," Wombo went on, "I want to know why you came here."

"I had a curiosity."

"That curiosity will cost you dear."

"It has already."

"The end is not yet. You have not told me all. Why did you come here? You are the man hired to guard the body of the Black Cur."

"By the Black Cur you mean—just who?"

"Warren Trench."

"And you are the man whose satellites sought to mutilate his body after death. Can you see no connection?"

"Perhaps. I think I understand what you mean, but was that your only reason for coming here?"

"What other reason could I have?"

The dark look deepened on the face of Jaipur, the Tiger.

"You seek to avoid answering. It is best to talk straight. It may make your death easier!"

The Tiger was utterly merciless it seemed, for he had resolved the detective's life must be sacrificed.

Fire-Eye's independent attitude was not altered in the least, as he calmly asked:

"Do you imagine you know more about the affair than I do?"

"I know what you will not tell. Ha! What fools you Americans are! I never saw but one who was more than a cur. They are like the English, and the English are all dogs!

"I know why you came, but you made a fool of yourself. You came in the place of one who dared to make love to Rana, but dared not come here for her."

"That is proof of your folly. Did he think the girl cared for him? Haugh! She has learned her lesson well. I have taught her to deceive all with white faces. She deceived him, and she fooled you."

"Did you fancy she would regard you as a friend? Did you think she would protect you after you entered her chamber? Did you imagine when Mahoor rapped at the door she told him she had just been aroused from sleep?"

"I see you did! That shows how much a fool you are! She spoke in a language you did not understand—she told him you were in the chamber—told him to enter her sleeping room by another door and snare you."

"Ha! ha! ha! You look surprised—you doubt! It is true, every word."

"It is a lie!" cried Fire-Eye, who could not believe such treachery possible in the heart of the beautiful girl.

Jaipur started, his yellow right hand vanishing beneath the robe he wore. There was a bloodthirsty look on his evil face, accentuated by the flare of crimson light which the changing globe flung over him at that instant.

He looked like a tiger, in truth!

CHAPTER XVIII.

A WOMAN'S TREACHERY.

"Dad!"

The word hissed through the teeth of the yellow-faced man on the divan.

Still the detective did not flinch; still his face wore a look of scorn; still his bold eyes met those of his captor.

He knew the vanished hand of the Tiger Rajah clasped the haft of a kris, which the Indian longed to bury in his throat, but that knowledge did not cow him a particle.

Instead, he boldly spoke:

"You are free with your tongue, my man, but the time may come when it will cause you trouble. Were I free, you would not dare call me that."

Jaipur could not understand this utterly fearless man, as he plainly showed by asking:

"What do you mean, cur? Would you dare attack me?"

"Order my hands released and see."

"Fool! I am armed!"

"I know it. Your hand is on a knife now."

"Still you do not fear?"

Fire-Eye actually laughed.

"You do not know me. Fear you! I have not lost self-respect to such an extent."

"Ha! I know different! Your face is pale. You fear while your tongue speaks bold words."

"Again you lie!"

This was more than the Tiger could stand. With a screech pealing from his throat, he launched himself from the divan in one strong swift leap at the throat of the bound captive, the kris appearing in his fingers.

Straight at the throat of Prince Bruce struck the enraged Rajah, his mad desire being to make a fatal stroke.

Fire-Eye's feet were free, though his hands were bound. Back he bounded, and then he launched himself forward to meet the assault.

Out flew one of the detective's feet.

The Man from India was struck fairly in the pit of the stomach and lifted from the floor, to be sent writhing and sprawling, striking against the divan and upsetting it instantly.

It was a terrible kick, and the only wonder was that it did not fatally injure Mr. Dundal Wombo.

Then the detective felt himself clutched and hurled down by the attendants, who cast themselves on him in a body. He was struck once on the head, but that did not stun him.

However, he could make no successful struggle, as he well knew, and so he permitted them to drag him from the room back to where he had first been cast down.

There his hands were examined to make sure they were secure, and his feet were once more bound. The attendants regarded him with fear, as was plainly apparent from the manner they moved around him, and he laughed in their faces.

Again Fire-Eye was left alone, the slaves hurrying back to the room from which now issued the sound of excited voices, mingled with the most pitiful groans.

Prince had plenty of time to reflect on what he had done and the probable result, and he knew well enough that, without a doubt, he would be severely punished.

Still he did not regret what he had done, for he could not see his situation was much worse than it had been before, and he had temporarily prolonged his life by that kick.

It was not in his nature to stand up and let any man call him a cur and a dog without a show of resentment, no matter what such resentment might cost.

But when he thought of Rana and the Tiger's assertion that the beautiful girl had betrayed him to his enemies in that house of mystery, his heart was torn by conflicting emotions.

Was it possible Dundal Wombo spoke the truth? Was it possible Rana had heartlessly betrayed the friend of the young man she professed to love?

No! he could not, would not believe it.

And still, how singular it was that the stranglers had found a way into her sleeping chamber and insnared him there!

He thought it all over carefully, unheeding the excitement in the room where he had so narrowly escaped death at the hands of Jaipur, the Tiger.

He remembered how strangely the girl had acted while answering the questions of the man who rapped at the door, and then, when the slight noise was heard in her sleeping chamber, she had asked him if he dared investigate.

It was certainly singular, to say the very least, but Prince would not admit to himself that his faith in her had been shaken on that account. He considered himself a good judge of character, and he had seen nothing but honesty in the dark eyes of the beautiful girl.

"Time will tell," he muttered.

Then he remembered his own wretched plight, and he began to strain at the cords that held him secure.

In vain!

"I'm in for it! There is no doubt about that. Unless something remarkable occurs, this is the end of me, for I know the black-faced dogs will not hesitate to snuff me out."

"I must confess this is the worst scrape I have run up against in a long career. And I brought myself here for what? I can scarcely say. My curiosity was aroused by the mystery surrounding the strange death of Warren Trench, and that has led me on to this."

Gradually the excitement in the next room subsided, but it was nearly an hour before the black men appeared again and rudely lifted the captive to his feet.

With very little ceremony, the detective was once more carried into the room where the encounter took place and deposited on a chair placed to receive him.

Jaipur, the Tiger, reclined on a divan in very nearly the same posture as when Fire-Eye first saw him, still smoking a cigarette. He seemed as cool and deliberate as possible, but there was a devilish glitter in his eyes when they turned on the helpless captive.

After some moments, the yellow-faced master of the house spoke:

"You seem to be a fighter, American. You are very quick with your feet."

"Under the circumstances, a fellow has to be quick with his feet if he does not want to eat steel," was the steady retort.

"You saved yourself for the time, but it will not prove a good thing for you, dog of a detective!"

The Tiger showed his teeth as he spoke those words in his icy fashion, and Fire-Eye once more felt a chill in his blood.

"You can do no more than kill me," declared the ferret.

Oh, what a smile crossed Jaipur's face!

"We shall see about that," he said.

Prince straightened up stiffly, a set look coming to his face. Although he uttered no word in return, the Indian understood the defiance in his manner and scowled.

"Wait a bit," advised Jaipur, with a slight gesture of one hand, as he sent a wreath of gray-blue smoke toward the ceiling. "Wait till you see my pet. You will cringe and beg then, American."

"But I wish to convince you you were wrong in one thing, though it matters little. You called me a liar when I told you how you were deceived by Rana. You shall see I spoke the truth."

He waved his hand, and one of the attendants slipped softly from the room.

A moment later, Rana entered, followed by the servant. The shifting light showed her more beautiful than ever, if such a thing were possible.

She looked straight at the detective, and nothing but great scorn was written on her face. Her red lips curled in a smile of disdain.

"Behold your dupe, Rana," said Jaipur, showing his teeth, his beady eyes full upon her. "He did not believe me when I told him how he was fooled."

A short laugh came from the girl's lips, and it seemed to strike a chill to the captive.

"What fools these Americans are!" she cried. "Did he think he could come to my rooms and be protected by me? Bah! I have white blood in my veins, but I am ashamed of it! My mother was the daughter of Bulphur, the pirate, as the English called him. I am proud of it! He cut many an Englishman's throat!"

Fire-Eye actually thrilled with horror. Could he believe the evidence of his ears? Was it possible this beautiful girl could be so bloodthirsty and heartless?

Jaipur smiled in his triumphant and evil manner, his eyes turning to the captive.

"What do you think now, dog of a Yankee?" he asked.

Fire-Eye was silent for a bit, and then, looking straight at Rana, he asked:

"Did you call the servants to capture me?"

"I did," was the prompt reply.

CHAPTER XIX.

CAST TO THE TIGER.

STILL the detective could scarcely believe it possible.

Jaipur laughed exultantly.

"Now, Yankee, you see how big a fool you are. Are you not ashamed of yourself?"

"No! I am ashamed of her! Thank God there are not many like her!"

The words were uttered in a ringing tone, and Fire-Eye fancied the girl paled a bit, even though her red lips parted in another scornful smile.

The Tiger Rajah uttered something like a smothered snarl, flinging the cigarette aside.

"Dog! The time is near when you will wish you had bitten your bold tongue off before uttering the words you have within this room!"

"You are profuse with your threats."

"Before long you will find my threats mean something."

"Go ahead. You have me in your power. Show what your nature is."

"I will make you squeal, American."

"If you were a sport, I would go you something on that. Never yet have I squealed."

"Never before have you been handled by a man like Jaipur, the Tiger. You were beautifully snared—"

"By the treachery of a woman I would have sworn incapable of such an act. Even yet I can scarcely believe it possible. She has not the face of so heartless a creature."

"I have the blood of Bulphur in me," was the reply of the girl. "He did not believe it was wrong to deceive an Englishman. What are the Yankees? They came from English stock. Why should I spare one of them? I shall laugh when I know you have perished!"

This was spoken in a manner that carried conviction to the heart of the unfortunate captive. He no longer doubted the dastardly character of this fair fiend.

That was the hardest blow Fire-Eye had yet sustained, and he could not help showing it, whereupon Jaipur laughed with satisfaction.

"I thought I could hit you some way, Yankee," he said. "I see I have not failed. This is the beginning. Your nerve is failing you."

Instantly Prince straightened up and looked the yellow rascal squarely in the eyes, returning:

"You never made a bigger error in your life. My nerves are steady as they ever were."

From beneath the old stone house came the smothered far-away roar.

The eyes of the Tiger Rajah glittered.

"Demon is getting restless," he said. "He has not eaten for three days, and he is anxious for a feast. Well, he has not much longer to wait."

He looked at the captive in a manner that plainly revealed his meaning, but Fire-Eye did not quail.

The detective realized there was some kind of a wild animal confined beneath the house, and that it was the intention of Jaipur to give the creature a square lunch off a human being!

Again the strange light flashed for a moment in the eyes of the ferret, but it quickly faded, to leave his face calm and passionless.

In his heart there was one great regret. He would die without being able to tell Harold Trench what a heartless thing was the girl on whom he had wasted his love.

Where was Harold? So many days had passed since Fire-Eye's capture—he had no doubt it had been many days—that the young man must have suspected something had happened to the detective.

Prince's mode of life now counted against him, for it had been his custom to disappear for days, weeks, sometimes months, and let no one know of his moves. For this reason, there would be no alarm at Headquarters in a long time.

Jaipur seemed to read the thoughts of his captive, for he smiled in his triumphant way, observing:

"They never will find a trace of you, my friend. Your bones will be forever buried from view. Now, I fancy you wish you had let the Tiger Rajah alone."

Not a word from Prince.

"You are not talking as much as you were," sneered the yellow-faced wretch.

"There is no reason why I should waste my breath."

"You will need it all when you begin to shriek for mercy."

The Indian delighted to gloat over his victim. He hoped to break down the detective's nerve in a measure, at least, as it would give joy to his cruel heart to see this man tremble and blanch.

"You will never hear me ask you for mercy," calmly returned Prince.

"Wait. You have not seen Demon."

"Take me to him. I prefer his company to yours!"

"How bold! You shall have your wish."

The potentate waved his sinewy hand, and the attendants once more grasped the detective. They had received their instructions, and there was not a moment of delay. From the room and down the stone stairs to the cellar Fire-Eye was carried.

Jaipur had a fresh cigarette brought and lighted, and then he followed the doomed man.

The cellar was lighted now, and the helpless ferret was carried along a passage that seemed to lead away beneath the wall of the Old Fort.

Finally, they entered a roomy underground place where the scent of some wild animal was strong. Prince heard an uneasy whimpering whine and the sound of some creature moving restlessly about. There followed a rattling of irons, succeeded by silence.

Then there came a laugh near at hand—low, soft, blood-chilling.

The detective knew it came from the lips of Jaipur, who had entered the cellar.

The following instant there was a snap and a glare of light that dazzled the eyes of the captive.

A dozen electric lights had been turned on.

"Behold my pet!"

The Man from India spoke, and, as soon as he recovered from that first blinding glare, Prince found himself standing close to an iron grating, beyond which crouched an enormous tiger.

The eyes of the beast were fixed on the prisoner, as if the creature realized its feast was before him. From side to side moved the tiger's tail.

"Isn't he a beauty?" laughed Jaipur.

"And he is so hungry!"

Then there was a terrible roar, as the jungle monster launched himself through the air and landed against the iron grating. It seemed that he must break through instantly; but Prince, who stood quite near the grating, did not shrink back or even change color.

"He is certainly a beauty," quietly observed the iron-nerved detective. "You must have found some trouble in bringing him here?"

A snarl of rage broke from the lips of the yellow-faced Rajah.

"Fool! I believe even yet you think I am playing with you! In less than five minutes Demon will be cracking your bones!"

"In which case I will soon be out of my misery. It is said a person feels no pain beyond the first shock beneath the paws of the tiger, so you have really given me a merciful death."

Despite the calmness with which these words were uttered, the red light was creeping into the Dread Detective's eyes, and he felt a tingling, burning, electric thrill all over his person.

The strange and subtle power he possessed was becoming aroused. In his soul there was a mad tumult of fury, and he felt that, were he free and empty-handed, he could cope successfully with all his enemies.

The Tiger had fallen back from the grating and was crouched with its eyes still fastened on the helpless man. The detective looked full at the creature, and the motion of the animal's tail was stilled.

"Pray! pray! pray!" shouted Jaipur. "Pray to your miserable God! Perhaps he will save you! Perhaps he will give you power to conquer the tiger! Ha! ha! ha!"

Then he uttered a cry in his own language, and the captive was caught up bodily by the attendants, to be swiftly borne up some steps to a level far above the pit in which the tiger crouched.

Jaipur ran up the steps, uttering a command, at which his servants paused.

"With my own hand I will thrust to the tiger the Yankee dog who dared strike me with his foot. I will laugh as he goes down—I will laugh as his bones crack in the tiger's jaws!"

"Accursed heathen!" burst from the lips of the doomed man. "Were my hands free but a single moment, they would fasten on your dirty neck and never let go until the breath of life had left your carcass!"

The detective's eyes were blazing now, and Jaipur could not look on them. The

Indian grasped his victim, literally shrieking:

"Die, dog—die! die! die!"

With a single strong thrust, Prince Bruce was sent plunging into the tiger's pit!

CHAPTER XX.

COWING A TIGER.

As he fell, the detective threw his feet out before him, so that when he struck in the tiger's pit he fell back in a sitting posture, his face turned toward the fierce beast.

The tiger was startled by the apparition of a human figure shooting down toward him, and he crouched back a bit, uttering a snarl and showing his teeth.

Not a sound came from the lips of the helpless man; not a sound was uttered by the men outside the pit.

Strangely as it may seem, Prince Bruce experienced no sensation of fear. Instead, his heart was burning with a terrible fury toward the yellow-faced imp who had doomed him to such a fate.

Although he was not aware of it, his eyes were burning also, and they were fastened steadily on the tiger.

Then Jaipur and his servants witnessed a remarkable thing.

The tiger began to lash his tail, crouching with his breast close to the ground, as if on the point of launching himself at his victim.

And the detective could not make an effort to save himself or show defense!

From side to side beat the tail of the hungry jungle monarch, but its motion gradually grew less violent until it subsided entirely.

The beast did not spring!

A low whining sound came from its throat and it seemed to hesitate, finally falling into a posture that showed it did not mean to devour the man at once.

Jaipur gave expression to his impatience and rage.

"What is the matter with the beast?" he cried. "Is he not satisfied with the offering? What does he want?"

Then the Rajah raved about like a madman, uttering imprecations on the tiger in his own language. He gave some orders, and the servants began to throw things at the tiger.

Instead of causing him to leap on his prey, this simply aroused the beast to growl and move restlessly.

The eyes of the remarkable detective, burning like coals of fire, had actually cowed the hungry creature!

Seeing this, the Rajah gave further orders, and the men brought long iron rods and prodded the beast.

The tiger whined and snarled, striking at his tormentors, but he still refused to touch the helpless captive within his reach.

"Accursed American!" raved Jaipur. "Do you bear a charmed life? Will nothing harm you?"

"Your pet is more merciful than his master," quietly returned the imperiled man, making every effort to keep his voice steady, not taking his eyes from the beast for a single instant.

"We shall see!" shouted the Indian. "He will devour you after a time."

But, although the Rajah waited an hour and tried in every way to make the animal leap on Prince, the detective still remained unharmed.

Finally the Indian became disgusted, and he turned away, saying:

"Perhaps Demon will change his mind when left alone. When he gets hungry enough, he will eat you; and right there you stay until he decides to do so."

At a word, the servants followed their master, and Prince Bruce was left to the mercy of the tiger.

"Thank God they did not turn off the lights!" was the thought within the ferret's heart.

He realized it was his eyes that had saved him; but he knew the gleam must soon fade from them, and then it seemed certain the hungry tiger must claim his victim.

Life was precious to Prince Bruce, but he believed no man could die before his time came, and, firm in this conviction, he awaited what was to follow.

Jaipur had not been gone many minutes

when the detective fancied he heard the sound of light footsteps.

"They are creeping back to witness the feast of the tiger," was his thought.

The sound came on swiftly until it was close at hand, but Prince dared not take his eyes from the tiger.

All at once, he heard the low cry of mingled amazement and joy—the cry of a woman!

He knew from whose lips the sound came.

Rana was there!

"Thank God!" she sobbed, as she clutched at the iron bars of the cage.

No sound came from the lips of the detective, but his heart fairly melted with rage toward this treacherous creature who had betrayed him in such a dastardly manner. He could hear her panting, but still his eyes remained on the tiger, for the beast was now growing restless.

"Forgive me! forgive me!"

The words were uttered by the girl, and Prince could remain silent no longer.

"So you have come to taunt me—possibly to witness my death at the jaws of this tiger!" he hoarsely exclaimed. "You are even more heartless than I thought possible!"

"Oh, don't say that! Oh, I do not blame you! I know how it seemed! I can't explain now! How can I save you—how can I?"

"More trickery," thought Fire-Eye. "They have sent her to arouse my hopes, and then she will leave me—laugh in my face. She shall not have the satisfaction." Aloud he said:

"Save me! Do you think I would accept life at your hands? Don't deceive yourself. I am very comfortable. In fact, the tiger has used me better than you did."

"You must let me save you—I will save you!"

She seemed in earnest, but Prince Bruce knew of all treacherous things nothing can compare with a treacherous woman.

"I prefer the tiger's company to yours."

"You do not believe me—you still think I am false! Oh, you are wrong—you are wrong! I will prove it to you! For the love of Heaven, let me show you I am not the vile thing you imagine!"

Suddenly she thrust her arms through the bars. She could reach him, and her tender fingers began tearing at the knots of the cord that held his hands secure.

Still he doubted.

A cry of despair came from the girl's lips.

"I can't untie the knots!" she moaned.

And then she seemed to remember something, for she ceased to work. A moment later she had a small knife in her fingers and was once more at the cords.

Not until his hands were freed did Prince feel a thrill of hope. Even then he concealed his emotion, for he realized it might be the object of his enemies to free him so they could have the pleasure of seeing him battle bare-handed with the tiger.

Without a word, he began to work at the cord which held his feet, and it did not take him long to get them free.

The tiger had grown still more restless, for he was moving about at the further end of the pit, lashing his tail.

With a feeling of relief, Fire-Eye arose to his feet.

For one moment he ventured to glance aside, and he saw Rana, her face white as death, leaning against the iron bars of the cage.

"How can I get you out?" she whispered. And then, with sudden great strength, she retreated from the cage, looking around. A thought seemed to come to her, and she disappeared into the passage.

The detective did not expect her to come back unless she were accompanied by Jaipur and the others, but she soon returned.

She had a rope in her hands.

Up the steps she ran till she was above the pit, and then she made the rope secure to an iron bar, flinging the free end to Prince.

"Quick!" she panted. "Get out before the tiger springs upon you!"

The rope dangled within reach of the detective—he grasped it!

The tiger lashed its tail and snarled.

"If you really wish to save me, come down from those steps and go to the opposite side of the cage," calmly said Prince.

"Do what you can—to attract the attention of the beast from me."

Down from the steps she darted, and around to the opposite side of the cage she went. Then, as he had instructed, she did all she could to attract the attention of the fierce beast.

Fortunately, Rana was successful. The tiger began to watch her, seeing which, Prince noiselessly prepared to ascend the rope.

When he was quite ready, the ferret went up swiftly, and not until he had nearly reached the top of the cage did the tiger realize what was taking place.

Then, with a terrible roar, the beast launched itself through the air, striking at the feet of the man who had cowed him with his eyes.

One claw tore the heel from the boot on Fire-Eye's right foot, but the ferret came out unharmed.

He knew the roar of the tiger would bring Jaipur to the spot, and not an instant did he lose in dashing down the steps.

"This way!" softly cried Rana, and he followed her.

CHAPTER XXI.

OUT OF THE DEN.

"HARK!"

"They're coming!"

Rana and Fire-Eye were in the darkness of the passage. They plainly heard excited voices that told the Tiger Rajah and his satellites were approaching.

The hand of the beautiful girl found that of the wonderful detective who had passed through such fearful peril.

"Come!"

She whispered the word in his ear.

Prince no longer hesitated about trusting her, unexplained though her remarkable conduct remained. He felt her fingers trembling in his grasp, and it plainly told him how much she dreaded discovery by Dundal Wombo and his men.

"Have you a weapon of any kind?" he asked.

Up to her hair went her hand, and she plucked forth a slender dagger.

"I must keep it," were her whispered words. "If I am found here, this is my only hope. I shall plunge it into my heart!"

He realized she was in earnest, and all his feelings toward her underwent a change.

"Keep it; but trust me," was his advice. "I am free and on my guard. They shall never take either of us!"

They had been hurrying along the passage toward the main cellar, but now, all at once, Rana drew the detective aside into a break in the wall.

"Wait here," she whispered. "They may pass."

Without another word, they waited there until three dark figures had flitted past.

"Now!"

Rana was growing cooler, and the detective followed, trusting all to her guidance.

Into the cellar and up the stairs. Then they heard hoarse cries coming from the underground pen of the Tiger.

"They have discovered my escape!" half-laughed Fire-Eye. "How Dundal Wombo will rave."

"You are not yet out of the house," whispered the girl. "There are others—"

Up before them rose a dark figure. Out shot the detective's hand. Not a sound—but Fire-Eye's fingers were fastened on a human throat.

Then followed a short, fierce struggle, that ended when the muscular ferret hurled the other to the floor with force enough to stun him.

"Come on!" cried Prince, softly. "Not an instant is to be lost! If I were armed, I would stay right here and wipe out this entire gang of heathen whelps. As it is, we must run."

The main floor of the house had been reached, and the detective allowed Rana to pilot him toward the door, hearing the swift approach of the three men who had descended to the cellar.

"Go!" panted the girl, as she flung open the back door. "I have saved you."

"You will not stay here?"

"Yes."

"You must not! Come!"

"Where?"

"With me." I will see you in a place of safety."

"There is no longer a place of safety for either you or me on the face of the earth!" declared Rana. "Jaipur, the Tiger, will never rest till he has destroyed us both!"

"And you would stay to meet your fate—to allow him to wreak his wrath on you?"

"What odds! It will simply shorten my time a little."

"You shall not stay! Come!"

"No!"

Instantly he caught her up in his arms, knowing not another moment could be wasted. He handled her as if she were light as a feather, darting round the corner and plunging toward the gate of the wall.

The guard was there, and he saw with astonishment the approaching detective bearing the girl in his arms. Almost before the fellow could recover, Prince was upon him.

Dropping Rana to her feet, the ferret flew like a savage beast at the throat of the guard. Then followed a short, sharp struggle that ended when the guard was flung heavily to the ground, being pinned there with the knee of the victor.

With remarkable swiftness the detective relieved the guard of his keys, but they were not needed, as the gate proved to be simply barred, and Rana had already flung it open.

At the same instant Jaipur and his satellites broke from the house and came rushing toward the escaping man and girl, uttering fierce shouts, weapons in their hands.

"Come! Come!" screamed Rana.

Then the Tiger Rajah began to shoot.

"Get outside the wall, so you will not be hit by the bullets!" ordered Fire-Eye. "Let me handle these brutes."

He arose to his feet with the guard held before him as a shield to protect him from the flying bits of lead.

The wretch in the grasp of the dauntless ferret cried out with terror, for he knew Jaipur would not hesitate to shoot a servant if he thought he could bring down an enemy at the same time.

But the Tiger ceased to fire, grating triumphantly:

"You cannot escape, dog of an American! I have you, and I will see you are finished this time!"

He was now close on the detective, and Fire-Eye suddenly swung the body of the guard above his head.

Straight at Jaipur the man was dashed, and the Indian was struck fairly in the pit of the stomach. The guard and the Tiger went to the ground.

With one bound, Prince sprung outside the gate, at the same time closing it with a slam.

Rana was waiting for him.

Together they ran for the shelter of the woods, the ferret offering to assist the girl, but finding her fleet of foot as a fawn.

"They will follow us!" was her declaration. "We cannot escape!"

"We will escape!" returned Prince.

He had no idea of being captured again after securing his liberty in such a manner, but the black men and their yellow-faced chief were soon in full cry after the fugitives.

"If I had a revolver I would stop and meet them!" grated the detective.

But he possessed no weapon save a club, which he caught up as he ran.

It was his fear that Rana would not hold out, but he soon saw the girl's power of endurance was great, for she seemed to be running quite as easy as himself.

"Jaipur is a wonderful runner," she declared. "He will follow like a hound on the scent."

They made their way through the woods, the ferret choosing the course and Rana trusting everything to him. At length they paused to listen, and it was with a feeling of untold relief that they realized they had given the Tiger and his satellites the slip in some way.

"Where can we go now?" questioned the girl, her voice shaking. "They will trail us inch by inch. We can be safe nowhere!"

"Trust me," said Prince, as he looked in the flushed face of the maiden. "I shall know no rest till this den of human beasts is broken up and the Tiger Rajah meets his just deserts. I tamed the tiger with my

eyes; perhaps I may yet tame the Tiger Rajah."

It was a perfect day, and, as they made their way through the forest Rana explained her unaccountable moves, which Prince had been unable to understand.

"Do not think I betrayed you into the power of Jaipur," she entreated. "Mahoor heard our voices and suspected, after which he brought the others to my sleeping-room, to which there is a blind door. But for my interference, they would have ended your life then and there."

"But you declared you betrayed me to the dastards."

"I was compelled to do that."

"Compelled?"

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"Jaipur."

"He—"

"You do not know him yet—you do not understand the depths of his nature. My father is the only white man he ever cared for. Father saved his life, and he took a solemn oath to avenge father's death. He brought me to this country, and I feel that I am doing wrong in deserting him thus, but it is to preserve my life. He would think it his duty to destroy me for turning against him."

Fire Eye looked at her with admiration, for he now understood how difficult had been the part she had played when the Tiger Rajah called her to taunt the captive. He had compelled her to appear the treacherous and heartless thing Prince Bruce had finally been convinced she must be.

"My little girl," he said, his heart filled with admiration, "you have done nobly, and I will see you do not suffer for it. The days of Dundal Wombo in America are limited. There is another—"

He was about to speak of Harold Trench, but checked himself, remembering the revelation she had made after he found her in the chamber of the Old Fort.

Harold was her half-brother! Fire-Eye could readily understand what a blow this would be to both of them when they learned the truth.

She heard his words and understood to whom he referred, for her face flushed crimson, and her eyes were fixed on the ground.

At that moment they emerged from the wood and stood face to face with—

Harold!

CHAPTER XXII.

THE DEATH OF THE HOUND.

"HAROLD!"

"Rana!"

She shrunk back, but, with a bound, the young lover clasped her in his arms.

"Thank Heaven!" he cried. "We meet again! You cannot know the fear—the distress I have endured! You cannot know how I have prowled about that dismal Old Fort, vainly looking for a glimpse of you! Oh, Rana, it is almost too good to be true! Are you really here—here with me!"

The joy in his eyes was no greater than that in her own, and the detective witnessed their delight with a feeling of deep regret, for he knew it was his duty to reveal the truth.

Harold kissed her fairly on the lips, quite unmindful of the third person, if, indeed, he had seen Fire-Eye at all.

Blushing crimson, the beautiful girl broke from his clasp, crying:

"Here is a friend, Harold."

"Prince Bruce, the detective!" exclaimed the young man, grasping Fire-Eye's hand. "Where in the world have you been for the last three days? You disappeared in such a mysterious manner that night, and I have not seen you since till this minute. I wonder if—

"All that will be explained later on," assured the ferret. "Just now we are in danger."

"Danger?"

"Yes."

"Of what?"

"Recapture by Dundal Wombo and his black whelps."

"Then you have been in the power of that creature?"

"Yes."

"How—"

"Listen!"

Rana's hand fell on the speaker's arm.

The trio listened.

Far away they heard a low long-drawn musical wail that echoed mournfully through the woods—a sound instantly recognized by the detective, whose features hardened.

"What is it?" asked Harold.

"A dog," was the reply.

"A bloodhound!" gasped the girl, her face growing pallid. "Jaipur has such a creature—fierce and terrible! He once tore to pieces a slave who tried to escape! If he overtakes us we are lost!"

Fire-Eye turned to Harold.

"Have you a revolver?"

The young man's hand went to his hip-pocket, and then he replied:

"I have not! My weapon is not here!"

The detective pressed his lips together and seemed to be thinking deeply for the moment.

Again the wild and mournful wail came echoing through the woods, and now the sound was much nearer.

The dog was coming forward swiftly.

"How far is the nearest house?" asked the ferret.

"Barret's Hotel."

"Then we must make a run for Barret's Hotel. Not an instant is to be lost. Come—lead the way!"

"But Rana—"

"I can run a little," assured the girl. "Don't worry about me. Go ahead."

It did not take Harold long to discover how fleet of foot this remarkable girl really was, and he looked at her with increased admiration and love.

With each passing moment, the baying of the dog was coming nearer, telling the creature was running out of leash.

Partially gathering her skirts about her, Rana leaped like a fawn over the obstructions in her path, her face filled with warm color and a wild sparkle of excitement in her eyes.

Across the open land they sped, cleared a fence and reached a grassy road, up and down which they looked in vain for sign of any living creature.

That section seemed deserted. The sun beat down hotly there, for it was hemmed in by woods that cut off the breezes.

Back in the woods just abandoned the voice of the bloodhound was echoing dolefully.

"How far to the hotel?" asked Fire-Eye, anxiously.

"More than half a mile by the road," replied Harold.

"Is there a nearer way?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Across this rough land; but it will be so hard for Rana."

"Don't think of that," urged the girl. "Haven't I proved my ability to hold my own? Take the nearest cut, by all means."

"Yes, take the nearest cut," urged Fire-Eye. "Over this fence—lively! Here we go!"

A moment later, as the dog broke from the woods, they were dashing across the pasture.

The detective looked back and saw the long dark body of the dog come streaking down across the open.

Harold also glanced back and saw the creature.

"We can't escape!" he grated.

"We will escape!" assured the ferret. "This is a race for life. I do not propose to be knocked out by a dog after what I have been through!"

All at once, Harold gave a cry of pain and fell to one knee. He sprung up, but ran on, limping painfully.

"What is the matter?"

"My ankle is sprained. Never mind me—go on! go on!"

"And leave you?" cried Rana. "No!"

"But the dog—"

"Leave the beast to me," came from the lips of Fire-Eye, whose face was grim and set. "Over yonder wall—lively!"

Together they rushed toward the wall, while the hound, his baying now changed to short, sharp yelps, came tearing toward them across the rough ground.

Harold limped still more painfully with

each passing moment, making it apparent he would soon give out entirely.

The wall was reached, but the dog, now fierce for blood, was close upon them.

Prince Bruce caught Harold and literally flung him over the wall, while Rana followed with one deer-like leap.

The detective sprung over instantly, and then he whirled to face the fierce bloodhound.

The dog's jaws were open, and he was coming like an arrow, his fierce eyes fastened on Fire-Eye.

Harold had fallen in a heap, and Rana was standing over him, her eyes on the dauntless ferret.

Prince had caught up a large stone in both hands and stood with it poised above his head, waiting the moment on which everything depended.

Straight up into the air shot the dog, aiming to fasten its fangs in the throat of the detective.

Then Fire-Eye hurled the stone.

His aim was true, and the bloodhound was struck fairly between the eyes.

An instant later, the fierce animal lay on the ground, kicking feebly.

The detective caught up the stone once more and again dashed it down upon the creature's head.

The dog lay still.

Fire-Eye's stern face relaxed, and something like a smile of triumph flitted across it.

"Is your ankle injured very much?" he asked, as he quietly turned to Harold.

"Great heaven, man!" was the retort; "you are a wonder! You kill a bloodhound with a stone, and then appear as unconcerned as if you had simply crushed a worm beneath your heel!"

"That is nothing!" exclaimed the girl.

"You should have seen him in the pit with the tiger! Why, he quelled and cowed the beast with his eyes, and the creature had not tasted food for three days!"

"We have no time to speak of these things now," put in the Dread Detective. "If Mr. Dundal Wombo owns this dog, he is not far away. Let's hasten to the hotel."

Harold was aided to his feet, and then Prince gave him assistance in crossing the rough ground.

Although they looked back many times, expecting to see Jaipur or his servants, not a glimpse of their foes was obtained.

The hotel was reached, and a room was obtained for Rana, whose first care was to see that Harold's ankle was properly attended.

Fire-Eye felt that a most difficult task lay before him, for it was his duty to reveal to the young man the relationship existing between himself and his sister, for there could now be little doubt that Rana was in truth the daughter of Harold's father.

The detective knew the revelation would be a severe blow to both, and any delay would simply make the truth more difficult to bear when it should finally become known.

As he was thinking this over, his attention was attracted by the appearance of a man who came up the road toward the hotel, having emerged cautiously from a patch of woods and leaped over a fence.

The appearance of the man and his every movement betrayed an interesting fact to Prince Bruce.

"Hello, my friend!" softly muttered the detective. "You are in disguise!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

SNARED AGAIN.

FIRE-EYE watched the stranger intently as that individual approached the hotel.

The man wore a long mackintosh that was turned up about his face, despite the heat of the day, while his hat, with a wide brim, was pulled well down over his eyes.

All at once, this person paused and seemed to be staring at one of the hotel's upper windows.

After a moment of this, he wheeled about and hurried away, soon disappearing down the road.

Prince whistled softly to himself.

"Changed his mind. Wonder what was the cause of that? By Jove! I would give a little something to know who that individual was."

He did not know that from one of the upper windows of the hotel the mysterious stranger had been signaled to turn back, but such was the fact.

Even though Fire-Eye did not know this, he suspected something of the kind, and he lost no time, in slipping out of the building to the stables in the rear.

Then he kept quiet and watched.

It was not long before a man came out by the back door of the hotel and hurried by a into the scrubby bushes that ran down close to the buildings.

It was Barret, the proprietor of the place.

Fire-Eye immediately followed, taking care to do so with the greatest caution.

Something told him he ought to know where Barret was going and whom he met.

The detective's ears were acute, as well as his eyes, and he followed the man with all the skill of an Indian trailer.

The path led to a little dark hollow by a spring, and there Barret met another person.

It was The Clincher.

By skillful work, Fire-Eye finally succeeded in reaching a spot where he could overhear what was passing between the two men.

They were laughing triumphantly and nodding their heads in a manner that told the trailer they felt satisfied over something.

The Clincher was speaking:

"You've done well, Barret," he declared. "We've got him foul! He's played right inter our fingers! Want ter hire men ter do up Dundal Wombo, eh? Why, of course we're his preserves! At ther same time we'll do him out of his richness."

"Bleed him! bleed him!" nodded the proprietor of the hotel. "He's in a hole."

"But I've got ter lay low till the fly as is after me gets out of this. Is he around today?"

"Haven't seen anything of him since last night, but Fire-Eye has showed up again."

"I'd like ter know what he wants hereabouts. He ain't down here for his health."

"Reckon he's onto our man."

"How can that be when our man is supposed to be dead?"

"It's pretty hard to fool Fire-Eye. Mebbe he has tumbled to the game."

"Not likely."

"But ye can't tell."

"Anyway, I reckoned it wasn't best for him to see our man, and so I gave the old boy the tip that Fire-Eye was in the house."

"What then?"

"He was coming up to see me, but he changed his mind mighty sudden and slid out."

"You have made all arrangements for the meet to-night?"

"Sure."

"At the old Dawson hut?"

"Yes"

"What hour?"

"Ten o'clock."

"Bob know?"

"Yes."

"Good! If we don't pull the leg of that dead man for all he is worth, we are clams!"

After a few more words, Barret turned back toward the hotel.

Clincher Mike squatted on a stone and proceeded to fill and light a cob pipe.

The hidden detective remained silent and watched the man.

What he had overheard gave Fire-Eye food for reflection, and he realized some kind of a deep game was being played by these men. More than that, he fancied he understood what the game was, although their words were not calculated to give a stranger an inkling of the truth.

Something told him he would soon solve the mystery of Warren Trench's remarkable death and burial.

He decided to follow The Clincher.

For at least half an hour the crook sat on the rock and smoked, while the detective lay silently awaiting his move.

Finally, Mike knocked the ashes from his pipe, put it in his pocket and arose.

A few moments later Fire-Eye was trailing the crook.

It was not such an easy task to follow Clincher Mike through the woods, for the rascal did not set his course by any beaten path. However, Prince did not hesitate.

Down into a dismal valley through which

flowed a sluggish stream they went, and there amid the shadows the shadower lost his man.

Fire-Eye moved forward with the greatest caution, and he finally saw a wretched hut hidden amid the moss-covered trees. The door of the hut was standing open, and the place had a deserted air.

Prince paused where he could watch the place, and for more than fifteen minutes he remained there, thinking he would make sure there was no sign of life about before he exposed himself.

At length, he resolved to go forward, but he did so with great caution, his hand naturally slipping to the pocket where he usually carried his revolver. Then he found the weapon was not there, and he remembered he had not armed himself since escaping from the clutch of the Tiger Rajah.

"I wonder if this is the Dawson hut, of which they spoke?" thought Prince. "If it is, they may be sure I'll be on hand at ten o'clock to-night."

Straight up to the open door he advanced, his eyes wide open for any danger.

No sound—no stir.

The place seemed most lonely and dismal, and he shrugged his shoulders with a slight shiver. However, as all remained quiet, he ventured to cross the threshold.

As he did so, something descended on his head with a stunning shock, and he was stricken to the floor, where he lay motionless for the time.

When Fire-Eye's senses returned, he found himself securely bound, while the smell of tobacco-smoke came to his nostrils. He looked around and discovered Clincher Mike sitting on an old box near by, serenely smoking his pipe.

"Hello!" sneered the triumphant crook. "So you're coming round, old hoss. Well, I didn't know but that t'ump on the nut had plumb knocked yer out fer good an' all. It wouldn't been no great loss if it had, so I didn't shed any weeps."

The detective realized he had fallen into a trap once more, and he was too angry with himself to speak for some time. He did not mind the throbbing pain in his head, for the great rage in his heart made him forget everything else. There was a mad fury in his eyes as he glared at his captor.

Clincher Mike threw one leg over the other, rested an elbow on his knee, and calmly continued smoking.

"If ye don't want ter speak, why don't wag yer jaw, old hoss," said the triumphant rascal. "But I reckon you'll be eager enough ter chin as soon as ye gets ther bee out of yer bonnet. I did swipe yer a good one on the nut, and that's a fact."

Still Fire-Eye did not speak. He ground his teeth with fury, but that simply caused the crook to grin.

"Perty tough," nodded Mike. "Well, ye don't want to chase after this chicken to any great extent if ye wants to keep out of trouble. I'm a bad boy to monkey with, and that's what's the matter with Sarah Jane."

"Now, mebbe you'll tell me what ye was sneakin' through the woods arter me for? I'm interested to know."

"I suppose you know you're wanted?" said Fire-Eye, as calmly as he could.

The rascal nodded.

"All ther same, I know you ain't down here arter me," was his assertion.

"How do you know it?"

"Oh, I'm dead on. I know a heap of things, pal. You're snoopin' round on another lay."

"Maybe I took a fancy to pinch you when I had a chance."

"Mebbe; but I don't reckon so."

"Then why was I shadowing you?"

"That's just what I wants ter find out, pardy. Why for do you t'ink I took all the trouble to swat ye over after this style? I don't go in for wastin' me valuable time on northin'."

The crook said this with a very knowing air, after which he thrust the stem of the pipe into his mouth and puffed away vigorously, a wise look on his ugly mug.

Without making a show of doing so, Prince strained at the bonds placed about his wrists. He simply drew them tighter, so they cut into the flesh and checked the flow of blood.

Clincher Mike had made no botch job of tying his captive

"You knows me, and I knows you, pardy," went on The Clincher. "I know you don't often waste your time chasin' small game like I am. You're out for the big birds. Now, what gets me is why you was piping me off."

"You want to know bad?"

"I guess yes."

"Well, speculate on it a while. Perhaps you will be able to guess the answer."

"Mebbe so. I ain't nary fool, though I may not look so bright as some. All the same I don't propose to monkey with you by telling ye things you don't know. It wouldn't do ye much good, anyway, but there ain't any reason why I should waste my wind. You won't ever do any more pinchin', unless you're dead in luck."

Fire-Eye did not misunderstand the threat in these final words, but the detective felt no fear. He was too angry to feel fear.

The Clincher went on:

"Mebbe you want to know what I'm goin' to do with ye? Well, I ain't goin' to slit yer wozzle, or anything like that; but I'll put ye away where you won't be rambling 'round permise'us like. There's a nice old damp-hole called a cellar down under this ranch, an' I'm goin' to dump ye there. Nobody comes near this place from one year's end to the other, so yer chance of gettin' out won't be very great."

"And you mean to leave me there to starve?"

"Ye don't like that?"

The detective's eyes were ablaze.

"You dog!" he grated. "I'll get square with you some day!"

"Now that don't give me a shake," sneered Mike, as he put up the pipe and approached the captive.

All at once he stopped, staring hard at Prince Bruce.

The eyes of the two men met, and The Clincher stood as if turned to stone, staring but making no move.

The detective concentrated all his wonderful power into that gaze.

It was a battle of eyes—a struggle for life or death!

CHAPTER XXIV.

FIRE-EYE'S TURN.

AND it did not last long.

Clincher Mike cringed and cowered before the burning eyes of the captured detective.

"Look t'other way!" he whimpered, in a manner quite unlike his usually arrogant demeanor. "They make me feel--make me feel---make me---"

His tongue seemed to grow stiff and useless in his mouth and nothing but a gurgling sound issued from his lips.

Fire-Eye was the victor.

"Come here!" ordered the detective, sternly.

The Clincher hesitated and then advanced, stepping in an uncertain and faltering manner, his eyes still fixed on the glowing orbs of the man who was now his master, although bound hands and feet.

"Kneel!"

The command was obeyed.

"Untie these cords!"

Then the crook made a fierce rebellion, uttering a muttered whine.

"Untie them!"

"Why should I do it?"

"Because I order you to."

"How can you order?"

"I do order, and you must obey!"

"If I refuse—"

"You won't--you cannot refuse. You must do exactly as I tell you. Come—I am in a hurry. I have no time to waste. Untie those knots!"

The entranced man made a last desperate effort to tear his eyes from the twin balls of fire that seemed burning into his very brain—and failed!

Then his fingers began working at the knots.

But this work was far too slow to suit the helpless man, who began to fear his power would wane, as the anger was dying out in his heart. If the fire left his eyes, he knew he was lost.

"Have you a knife?" questioned Prince.

"Yes."

"Use it—cut the ropes! Be quick about it, as I am tired of this."

The command was obeyed, and Fire Eye was once more a free man. He drew a deep breath of relief, as he sat up.

"Give me that knife."

The Clincher obeyed.

"Give me your revolver and any other weapons you may have."

He received them.

"Is this the Dawson hut?"

"No."

"Where is it?"

"A mile below, on the pond."

"You were to meet certain persons there to night at ten o'clock?"

"Yes."

"Don't you think it would be a great scheme, Clincher, to send me as a substitute in your place?"

"They'd do ye."

"I'll take chances on that. I believe I'll go, anyway."

"I'll tell—"

"Not a thing. You intended to chuck me into the cellar, but I'll not be quite as rough with you. Lie down."

This order was not promptly obeyed, for the fire was dying from the detective's eyes, and he had, to a great extent lost his power over Mike.

All at once, with a hoarse yell, the crook flung himself on the ferret, clutching Prince by the throat.

The attack was sudden and unexpected, almost overthrowing Fire Eye, but he rallied immediately, and then a fearful struggle began there in that old hut.

The Clincher battled like a maniac, and he was right in his element, having closed with a foe. He fully expected to get the best of the detective, but Prince Bruce was an all round athlete. He felt that he was fighting for his life, and he strained every nerve to the utmost.

The crook was finally flung heavily upon his back and pinned there by the detective's knee, while Fire Eye did not relax a hold he had obtained on the rascal's throat until Mike ceased to struggle and lay gasping for breath.

When The Clincher recovered, he found the tables fairly turned, for he was the captive, and the ferret was sitting quietly on the old box.

"Curse you!" gasped the beaten rascal.

"What's the use?" smiled Fire Eye. "Why don't you take it calmly? That is the best thing you can do under the circumstances."

"How did you do it?"

"Do what?"

"Get the best of me when I had you foul. I've heard of them eyes of yours, but I never dreamed they could knock the strength out of a cove in such a way."

"They are very handy things to have around on such occasions."

"What are you going to do with me?"

"I think I'll leave you here over night, while I go down to Dawson's hut and take your place."

"How will you take my place?"

"I'll pass myself off on your friends as you."

"It can't be done."

"Want to wager anything on that? I'll do it, and do it most successfully. That's why I'm pausing here to survey you. Later, I shall return and change clothes with you, and I shall be made up to look as much like you as possible."

"You can't mean you're actually going to make such a fool bluff?" he cried. "Why, Cockney Bob'll tumble to yer in a minute!"

"Well see about that. I have studied your face and your manner of speech, and I can make up as a first class Clincher. Tonight I shall certainly take your place, Mike, and you will not be in it at all."

The crook literally gnashed his teeth with fury, while the detective, now cool and triumphant, sat smiling on the box.

"Oh, I'll get even for this!" snarled Mike, showing his ugly teeth. "Don't think you can monkey with The Clincher an' not have something fall on yer hard!"

Fire Eye smiled at this threat.

"I have handled lots of fellows like you, and the most of them are doing time now. If you are too free with your threats, I may

take a fancy to see you are sent up, as you should be."

At this Mike simply glared, biting his tongue to keep back the torrent of passionate words which surged to his lips.

"You will be very comfortable here," Fire Eye went on. "I shall not treat you as wretchedly as you proposed to treat me, for I'm not going to cast you down into a dark hole of a cellar. You say this hut is seldom visited, and I will take my chance of your being released in time to bother me."

"What if I ain't released at all?"

"Don't you think it is fair turn about to let you take your chances? That was what you proposed to do with me."

Mike paled.

"I was foolin'," he asserted, hastily. "It'd mean murder ter leave a poor devil here all trussed up in this way! Nobody'd never find him!"

"Well, I think I'll let you take your chance of being found, Mike. It is what you deserve. I can't spend any more time with you now, so you will have to excuse me."

Then the coward in the crook's nature showed, for he began to whine and beg most pitifully, promising all manner of things; but the detective paid no further attention to him, and soon the unlucky rascal heard Fire Eye's footsteps dying out in the distance.

The ferret had no idea of leaving the man there to escape as best he could or not at all. With the coming of another day, at least, he meant to return and release the unlucky Clincher.

He had been away from the hotel for a long time, and he now made his way back toward the place. To his surprise, he found he was much further from the hotel than he imagined.

As the detective approached the disreputable public house, a feeling that something was wrong came over him. He had a presentiment that he was soon to make an unpleasant discovery, and he was right.

Straight to the room that had been assigned to Harold he hurried, but the young man was not there. This was surprising, as he had imagined the sprained ankle would keep Harold from moving about a great deal.

To add to his astonishment, the door of Rana's room was standing wide open, and that room was also deserted.

"Where can they be?" muttered the detective, as he hurried down and called for Barret. "They must be somewhere about."

When the proprietor of the hotel appeared, Prince made eager inquiries.

Barret looked astonished.

"Ain't neither of them in their rooms?" he asked.

"They are not. Have they left the hotel?"

"Not that I know about," was his answer. "I haven't seen 'em of late, but I reckon they're 'round."

In this, however, he was wrong. Both Harold and Rana had disappeared, and not a trace of them was to be found. Their vanishing was most mysterious.

A hard look came to the face of the detective, and he mentally exclaimed.

"I fear this is the work of Jaipur, the Tiger! If they have fallen into the power of that wretch, God help them!"

CHAPTER XXV.

AT THE OLD HUT

THAT night, under cover of darkness, a figure slouched up to Dawson's old cabin on the shore of the pond.

"Blawst me bloomin' heyes!" muttered this individual, who was none other than the English crook, Cockney Bob. "Hi'm blowed bif. Hi don't believe Hi'm the first to harrivel."

The old hut looked so dismal and forbidding that the Londoner held back and would not enter it alone.

"Hi'll stay right 'ere until one of the hotliers come halong," he decided. "Hi don't like this owling wilderness, don't ye know, don't ye understand? Hit's so bloomin' dismal hit gives me the cold chills, don't ye see?"

He did not have long to wait.

The sound of soft footsteps was heard, and a muffled figure came sneaking toward the hut.

Bob drew back into the shadows.

The muffled figure advanced to the door and flung it open.

"Ello, pal."

At the sound of the English crook's voice the late comer wheeled, his hand seeking a weapon.

"Who are you?" he demanded, his voice hoarse and harsh. "Speak quick and straight, if you don't want to chew lead!"

"Old hon! old hon!" entreated Bob. "Hi'm hall right—Hi'm to meet you ere, don't ye know, don't ye understand, don't ye see. Hi'm—"

"Cockney Bob?"

"Sure."

"All right then. Come in."

The muffled man passed through the open door, and Bob followed at his heels, after which the door was closed.

The Englishman heard his companion feeling around in the darkness and then a match was struck, after which a candle that stood on a square wooden table was lighted.

As the light became strong, the muffled man surveyed the English crook with the greatest deliberation and closeness. The stocky, bull-necked thug grinned.

"Ow you like my looks, pal?" he asked.

"You seem like a good first class scoundrel," was the quiet reply. "I don't think you'd hesitate about slitting a throat if there was enough in it to pay you for the trouble."

"Hi swear!"

Cockney Bob did not exactly relish this blunt answer to his question, as his scowl plainly showed, but the muffled man did not seem at all alarmed by the glare of the crook's eyes.

"You are just the kind of a fellow I instructed Barret to secure, for I have hot work on hand," declared the man in the mackintosh. "I want two men who will not wink at anything I direct them to do—two men who are not afraid of the devil himself. I have the rocks, and I propose to pay for the job on hand."

At this the Londoner grinned.

"Rocks is wot we're lookin' hafter, hold boy," he nodded. "Hi've done some stiff jobs in my time, hand Hi'm ready for anything there's money hin."

"You attempted to work my wife, thinking she had poisoned me. In that you were wrong. I am still a very lively dead man, as Dundal Wombo shall discover."

With that the mackintosh and muskrat were flung aside, and the wide-brimmed hat was cast into a corner.

Cockney Bob looked with interest on the tall, black-bearded man that stood before him.

"You hare a sharp one!" the English crook finally exclaimed. "Hi never eard the bequal hof the trick you played."

"If it were a common thing, it would not have succeeded. As it is, I am now a dead and buried man."

"Ow'd you never learn hit?"

"In India. But even there it is a marvel. Sit down. We may as well make ourselves comfortable until Clincher Mike arrives."

"E should be 'ere now."

"Something has delayed him."

"The bloomin' bobbies 'ave been worryin' 'im don't ye know, don't ye understand?"

"Here?"

"Yes. One hot them was baround yes terday, hand Mike ad to lay dead, don't ye see."

At this moment, the door was flung open and a man leaped into the room, instantly closing it behind him. He put his back against it, and the precious pair at the table were startled to discover the intruder wore a full beard.

The individual who had entered thus abruptly was, in truth, Fire Eye, the detective.

"Who are you?" cried the black-bearded man, making a move to start from the table.

The man against the door motioned for the others to be quiet, saying deliberately:

"Don't get hasty, pals. It's all right. The cops ain't around, but I expected to run inter Fire Eye, and he knows me too mighty well not to want to know where I was goin'. I didn't care about being shaddered,

and so I wore this beard, as makes me look like a farmer. It comes off easy—see."

With a quick motion, the detective removed the false beard, and stood before them the perfect counterpart of Clincher Mike.

Fire-Eye had carried out his part well, but he was gazing with the greatest interest at the black-bearded man across the table.

He had seen that face before when it lay in a coffin, apparently cold in death, for the person who sat opposite Cockney Bob was none other than the mysterious Warren Trench!

The ferret had not a doubt of this, and yet he had seen Warren Trench seemingly rigid in death when the coffin was opened at Greenwood.

Had the man been buried? If so, how had he been resurrected?

The detective was too shrewd to remain staring at Trench for a length of time that would attract attention. Flinging down the false beard, he securely barred the door, after which he made sure the wooden shutter at the single window of the room was closed so tightly no one could peer in from the outside. Then he brought a chair and sat down at the table, observing:

"We are here, and we'd better get right down to biz. Barret says there's hot work on hand."

Trench nodded.

"Barret is right."

"Well, is there scads in it?"

"If the job is well done, you shall be well paid."

"Hi hallow 'e can depend hon hus, eh, pal?" put in Cockney Bob.

"That's what he can," nodded the disguised detective. "We're out for stuff, and it don't make any great amount of difference how we get it."

"Know Dundal Wombo?" asked Trench.

"Know of him."

"He's my meat."

"You want us to go up against that critter?"

"I want you to do that whelp for good and all. Understand?"

"That's easy enough to understand, but it's said Dundal Wombo is a holy terror."

"Which is right," agreed the man who had come back from the grave. "Had he been an ordinary man, I would have done him myself long ago. He has pursued me from India, and, in order to escape him and his chosen allies, I was forced to die."

"But you did not die?"

A strange smile crossed the face of the black bearded man.

"Ah," he said, slowly, "I am not sure of that myself. I feel that I have in truth been dead."

"That don't go. It can't be!"

"How do you know? I have studied the magic of India, and the Eastern magicians do some marvelous things. Resurrecting the dead is one of their feats."

"That don't go with us, don't ye know, don't ye see, don't ye understand?" spluttered Cockney Bob. "When a cove is dead, he's dead, hand there ain't any show for 'im to come back to life."

"Not if he is dead for fair," agreed the disguised ferret. "You may have been in a trance, pal, but—"

"My heart stopped beating—my brain no longer worked—the blood ceased to flow in my veins. Why, I was buried and remained beneath the ground two days and nights!"

This assertion was made in the most positive manner, and Fire-Eye realized Warren Trench actually believed his own words.

"How could ye breathe, pal?" he asked.

"I did not breathe."

"Oh, come off!"

Warren Trench made an impatient gesture. "I see you do not understand and do not believe. Never mind. It makes little difference. You are to remain silent as death in regard to my return to life until after Dundal Wombo is out of the way. Then I care not who knows the truth. It was to escape him I went through so much, for he was determined to have my life, and he nearly succeeded many times."

"But, to come down to business, how do you propose to get at this heathen wretch?"

"Just leave that to us," nodded Fire-Eye. "We'll find a way to fix him—eh, Bob?"

"Sure."

"What we wants ter know," the disguised ferret went on, "is how much there is in the job."

"Right," chuckled the English crook, his eyes twinkling greedily. "Hand you 'ave got to come down 'eavy, don't ye see, don't ye understand."

"I do not think we shall quarrel about that," said Trench. "I am ready to pay you well."

"How well?"

"I'll give you five thousand dollars when the job is done."

Bob was about to make some observation, but the detective checked him with a quick gesture.

"That don't go, pardy."

"No?"

"Not much."

"What do you want? That is better money than you ever received for a similar job. Why, confound you! you have cut throats for a hundred!"

"When we deals with a gent as has rocks, we goes for his plle. See?"

"What do you want?"

"Well, we have to live while we're lookin' for a chance to knock out this Mr. Wombo, an' we want good feed and good bedding. Ketch on? You've got ter plank down a starter."

"Well, name it."

Before another word could be uttered, there came a sudden heavy knocking at the door.

The trio started to their feet, looking into each other's faces in alarm.

"Open up!" shouted a hoarse voice outside.

"Who is it?" huskily questioned Warren Trench, a desperate light in his eyes.

Again the heavy thumping sounded on the door.

"Open! open!" shouted the person outside.

"Let me in—lively!"

Fire-Eye recognized the voice.

It was that of the genuine Clincher Mike!

CHAPTER XXVI.

FIRE-EYE DISAPPEARS.

THE CLINCHER was at the door!

"Great Scott!" thought the detective.

"Here is a situation!"

He realized the captured crook had escaped in some manner and lost no time in hurrying to the old hut.

What was to be done?

The ferret could have drawn his weapons and commanded the situation, but he did not wish to make such a move, although he realized Warren Trench and Cockney Bob must soon know the truth.

"It's the cops!" he whispered, excitedly.

"They have tracked me here!"

Then he immediately ran lightly across the floor and threw back the wooden shutter at the window.

By this time, Cockney Bob was struck by something familiar in the voice of the man who was pounding at the door.

"Blawst me bloomin' heyes!" muttered the English crook, in a dazed manner, staring hard at the detective. "Hif Hi couldn't see The Clincher with me hown heyes, Hi'd swear that was his voice, don't ye see, don't ye know, don't ye understand!"

The disguised detective almost laughed aloud, for there was a certain humor about the situation that appealed to his sense of the ridiculous.

In a moment, he discovered the sash of the window was securely nailed, so it would be impossible to open the window in an ordinary manner.

But that did not bother him a great deal.

As he wheeled back to the door, he caught up the mackintosh Warren Trench had worn when he entered.

"Open this door!" shouted The Clincher, from the outside. "If there's a bloke in there that looks like me, gaffle to him an' hold him tight, fer he ain't me at all!"

"Who the howlin' blazes are you?" cried Fire-Eye, who was now in the middle of the floor. "What yer mean by comin' round here an' makin' all this racket to disturb respectable folks? Git out before I open the door and blow ye full of cold lead!"

"That's him! that's him!" excitedly

screamed The Clincher. "That is the bloke Gaffle to him!"

"You're crazy," returned the detective. "Get out! I'm goin' to open the door and shoot!"

He did rush at the door with the idea of flinging it open suddenly, knocking The Clincher over, and vanishing under cover of darkness; but the next words of the unseen crook caused him to change his mind about making such a move.

"Come on, blame ye! I've got a gun, an' we'll see who kin shoot first!"

"Blow me stiff!" gurgled Cockney Bob, his eyes on the disguised detective. "There's something bloomin' hodd habout this fellow, don't ye know! 'Anged his Hi believe 'e is The Clincher, don't ye understand! Then he must be an impostor, don't ye see!"

"You're right!" came from beyond the barred door. "Let me in! He is Fire Eye, the detective!"

Then Warren Trench suddenly tried to grapple with the exposed ferret, but, like a flash, the detective slipped under his arm, wheeled and struck him in the back of the neck.

Down on his hands and knees went the man who had returned from the grave.

But Cockney Bob was awake, and he stirred himself to get hold of Prince. As he rushed forward, the ferret's foot struck him near the pit of the stomach, and the bull-necked London crook was doubled up in a distressing manner.

With a laugh, Fire-Eye ran across the floor, slung the mackintosh over his head, double up like a ball, and went crashing through the small window out into the darkness of the night.

Warren Trench was the quicker of the two fooled scoundrels, and he sent a bullet after the disappearing detective, which, however, was wasted.

The mackintosh had protected Fire-Eye's hands and face from the glass, and he had escaped from the hut uninjured.

While Cockney Bob was groaning and clinging to his stomach, Trench flung open the door, intending to dash out, revolver in hand, with the thought that he might be able to get another shot at Prince.

At the same moment, Clincher Mike attempted to dash into the hut, and the result was a collision that overthrew them both.

Trench was on his feet almost immediately, but when he ran around the hut to the window, not a sign of the man he was after could he see.

The ferret had gotten away, leaving a trio of furious rascals behind.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE STRUGGLE IN THE HOTEL.

WHAT had become of Harold and Rana, who had disappeared in such a mysterious manner?

For a time after Fire-Eye's unexplained departure neither missed him, being so engrossed with each other. The girl did what she could to make Harold comfortable, and he declared his sprained ankle was much better. In truth, the sprain was not severe, and he would have been able to walk fairly well at that moment had it been possible for him to have rested, immediately after injuring the ankle.

But this slight injury was soon forgotten by the lovers, who were now happy with each other.

Rana told Harold of Fire-Eye's adventures in the Old Fort, and the young man realized how much he owed the daring detective who had finally succeeded in bringing the beautiful girl away for all of Jaipur, his servants, and the fierce bloodhound.

But fate decreed the lovers should not speak of anything that might betray to themselves the relationship Fire-Eye had discovered existed between them.

"You are safe out of Dundal Wombo's power forever, sweetheart," said Harold.

She shook her head, a look of fear suddenly settling on her beautiful face.

"Ah! you do not know his power, Harold!" she cried. "We are not safe here—we will never be safe until the Tiger Rajah is dead!"

"You overestimate him, dear girl. He has impressed you with the belief that he is

so mighty; but you will find he amounts to very little outside that old stone house. There he may be a sort of monarch; but elsewhere he is a very ordinary man."

"Your words show how little you know of the Stranglers. When they decree a man shall die, there is no escape for that person—death is his end, and it comes by the cord. I shall be placed under the ban."

She lifted her shapely hands to her throat, shuddering, as if she already felt the touch of the deadly cord.

Despite himself, the young man felt the color leave his face as he thought of her whom he loved so dearly, entangled in that fatal noose.

"We will go far from here—we will go where they cannot follow," he assured, hastily.

"You do not know them," she repeated, rather sadly. "They will follow a doomed person to the end of the earth. That is what brought Jaipur to America. If he decrees that I shall die by the cord, there will be no place in all the world where I can hide from the Stranglers."

Her manner impressed him, and a great feeling of horror crept into his heart.

"But you are a woman—a girl! You are fair, innocent, beautiful! Surely they—"

"Sex or innocence is not respected by the Black Thugs. No, Harold, that will make no difference. And still I am happy, for I am with you!"

In her artless way, she flung her arms about his neck, and their lips met in a clinging kiss of true love.

"We will go from here as soon as Fire-Eye returns," he declared. "You shall become my wife without delay. Then I shall feel better able to protect you from these dusky faced devils."

After a little, she walked to the window and looked out. Immediately she started back, uttering a choking cry.

"What is it?" questioned Harold, half-rising from his chair.

"Mahoor!" was the panted reply. "Jai-pur's trusted servant and ally!"

"Where?"

"Watching the hotel from the grove yonder. I saw him plainly, but he is hidden now. Oh, Harold! I feel that we are in great danger! We must get away from here without delay!"

Her words and manner impressed him, and he began to feel that there was danger beyond a doubt. However, he tried to reassure her.

"Do not be hasty. Wait. Bruce will return in a short time, and we'll trust everything to him."

"I feel that every moment of delay puts us in great danger," was her declaration. "We should get away at once. Come, Harold, for my sake!"

He found himself unable to resist her appeal.

"How can we go?" he asked. "I can do nothing. We must depend on the detective. When he reappears, I will have him get a team of the landlord and drive us to the railroad station, where we can take a train for Brooklyn. We will be in New York before night."

"If we wait, we shall not get there," came convincingly from her now pale lips. "Trust me to get the team."

"No, no!"

"Why not? I can go to the landlord and call for it, and then I will assist you down the stairs."

"I will go. You must not—"

When he attempted to rise, she gently forced him back into the seat, and then she flitted from the room, saying she would quickly return.

Filled with uncertainty, scarcely knowing which was the right course to pursue, the young man sat in the chair, the slight exertion having given him a twinge of pain in the swollen ankle.

Possibly three or four minutes passed, and then he was electrified by hearing a shrill scream, followed by a cry for aid.

He recognized it as Rana's voice!

In an instant the ankle was forgotten. He leaped to his feet, grating,

"Merciful heaven! Has Dundal Wombo found her?"

Then he bounded out of that room and went down the stairs four at a time.

The sound of a struggle directed him, and he quickly burst upon a scene that sent the fiery blood of passion to his head and filled him with uncontrollable fury.

Rapa was faintly struggling in the grasp of Barret, the landlord, while a big, brutal looking tough stood by, laughing in an evil manner.

"Let you go, my beauty?" Barret was chuckling, in a drunken manner. "Not much! I do not let such prizes slip once they have fallen into my hands. You'll stay right here, for—"

He was interrupted by a furious exclamation from Harold, who rushed like a tiger at his throat.

"Look out, Jake!" shouted the landlord. "Crack him! He's lame, and so he can't do much."

"We'll see about that!" cried the young man. "I'm a match for two such miserable ruffians as you are!"

Jake, the second tough, blocked Harold's path, but the infuriated young fellow let drive a blow that toppled the rascal up against a table.

Then Rana's champion tore the girl from Barret's grasp, at the same time giving the landlord a hard clip on the chin.

This aroused Barret, who was really a bruiser, and he returned the blow with interest.

For the moment, Harold was hampered with Rana, and Barret came near knocking him out.

Realizing how he was at a disadvantage, the young man found himself forced to release the girl and give his entire attention to the frothing landlord.

The girl was caught up by the second ruffian, who clapped a hand over her mouth, thus preventing another outcry, for her strength was nearly exhausted by the struggle she had already made.

To Barret's surprise, the young man, lame though he was, proved a skillful and fierce fighter, and the proprietor was gradually getting the worst of the battle.

"Help, Jake!" he called. "Swipe him! Do him!"

A moment later, Harold Trench felt a terrible shock, saw a blaze of light that was followed by darkness.

Forward on his face he was hurled, knocked senseless by a chair in the hands of the ruffian Jake.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE FACE AT THE GRATING.

"HAROLD!"

The word was breathed in his ear by lips he loved. He heard it faintly yet distinctly, and he knew Rana was near at hand, yet he was unable to stir and cast off the spell that held him enthralled.

"He does not move—he does not breathe! He is dead!"

The anguish of her voice stirred the blood in his veins, and, as her lips were pressed to his, he succeeded in lifting his arms and placing them about her neck.

"He lives!" she cried, joyfully.

He held her as close as his depleted strength would allow, not yet realizing their situation or caring where they were so long as he had her near.

"Rana—sweetheart!"

"My hero—my king!"

Then his eyes opened, and he saw her faintly, for the only light in that wretched place was that which came from a single candle.

He did not ask where they were, for he was too overjoyed to know she had not been torn from him while he lay helpless and unconscious.

"Awake, Harold!" she entreated. "Arouse yourself! We must try to escape in some way."

With an effort, he flung off the dreamy lethargy that seemed wooing him back to oblivion.

"What has happened? Where are we?"

"We are prisoners."

"Prisoners?"

"Yes."

"Where? For what?"

"Have you forgotten? Don't you remember the—"

He pressed his hand to his head, looking

at her in a dazed manner, evidently making an effort to recall what had happened.

"The dog—we were running for life! I sprained my ankle! Were we captured by Dundal Wombo? No! What—"

She pressed her soft hand over his lips for she saw he was growing still more confused.

"The detective killed the dog with a stone, and—"

"I remember. Then—"

"We reached the hotel."

"The hotel!" and he started up. "Yes we reached the hotel! I was in the room and heard your cry for help! I rushed down the stairs! I remember! I remember! The brutes! They shall suffer for this! Oh, the dogs! They dared touch you!"

Again she checked his passionate words.

"Soft, Harold! We are the prisoners of that ruffian landlord. Perhaps he may be where he can hear what you are saying."

"I care not! Let him hear! I will find a way to make him suffer for this perfidy!"

"I fear we are both helpless in this wretched hole."

"Where are we?"

"In the cellar beneath the hotel. Some one was coming, and Barret was forced to get us out of the way without a moment of delay. I struggled, but what could I do against two such brutes! Here we are—"

"But here we will not remain."

"I have searched the place for some way of getting out. I fear we cannot escape."

"Let me see."

He attempted to rise, but a twinge of pain in the injured ankle caused him to fall back for a moment. Then he got up resolutely, for all of his injury.

During the next fifteen or twenty minutes he thoroughly examined the dungeon like place in which they were confined, and his heart sunk when he found how secure it really was. However, he resolved not to let Rana know he had lost faith.

"Is there a chance?" she asked, eagerly.

He turned and put his arms about her, replying:

"Of course there is a chance, sweetheart."

"You think we may escape?"

"We will escape some way. We must escape! What will Barret do with us anyway? He will be forced to release us sometime."

"Not if he is the wretch he seems to be."

"But he can't keep us here till we starve."

"He does not intend I shall starve. Oh, Harold! when there is no danger of interruption, the brutes will come and take me from you!"

He strained her close to his breast and his voice literally quivered with fury, as he cried:

"Let them try it! I was struck from behind and overcome up above but I shall be prepared to meet them when they come here!"

"How prepared? You are not armed."

"I will find a way to arm myself, Rana, darling. There are stones all around us."

"But they are cemented into the wall."

"Perhaps there is a loose one that I can tear from its bed. Oh, I'll arm myself some way! Then let them try to tear us apart! There will be one or two dead ruffians here abouts!"

This was said in a manner that told he meant every word, and a faint hope that he might be able to cope with their enemies sprung up in her breast.

"But," she questioned, after a time, "what if they do not come near us—what if they leave us here to starve?"

"They'll not do that."

"Why not?"

"What could be their object?"

"What was their object anyway?"

"Ah! That man Barret—vile dastard that he is!—was attracted by your beauty."

"He was drunk."

"That is true; but when he becomes sober, he will still see you are beautiful, and he is a villain. Do you understand? You must trust all to me, if they come before we escape or are rescued."

"Rescued?"

"Yes."

"Who is there to rescue us?"

"Have you forgotten Prince Bruce—Fire-Eye, the detective?"

"I had forgotten him. Do you think he will find us and set us free?"

"He will find us if anybody does. He is shrewd and daring, and when he discovers we have disappeared, he will not delay about making an investigation."

"They will send him on a false scent."

Harold shook his head.

"Not an easy thing to do with Prince Bruce. He will commence to pick up clues right where we disappeared, so keep a good heart, dearest. This misfortune cannot last a great while."

"And we are together!"

Their lips met again.

When he had reassured her to the best of his ability, the young man sought for the stone that should prove a weapon in his hands in case their enemies came to part them. For a long time he worked at the walls, but the cement resisted every effort of his bare hands, and he was finally forced to abandon the task.

Then he worked at the door and the grating, hoping to find some way to break out.

This task did not result to his pleasure, and he finally uttered a cry of angry despair.

"It is useless, Rana! we cannot escape!"

"I knew it," she said, sadly. "I felt sure of it."

"But we will not give up. All depends on Prince Bruce now. He must save us. It will be a good thing for Barret that he keeps out of my clutch! If I ever fasten my fingers on his throat, I'll not take them away until he is dead!"

This was said with such savage fierceness that Rana shuddered.

"There is one good thing about our misfortune," declared the girl.

"What is that?"

"While we are here, we are not in the power of Jaipur, the Tiger."

"That is true. But is it not possible Jaipur is in league with Barret?" questioned Harold, struck by the idea. "Is it not possible we are held here to be delivered into the hands of that yellow-skinned villain?"

The girl shook her head.

"Jaipur would scorn to league himself with a white man. No, you may be sure he has nothing in common to do with this person you call Barret."

Harold drew a breath of relief.

"Then, while we have fallen into the hands of white foes, we are safe from the Stranglers."

"For the time, without a doubt. But Jaipur—Merciful Heaven! Look there!"

She pointed at the grating in the heavy door, against which was pressed a dusky face—the face of an Indian!

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SECRET PASSAGE.

"MAHOOR!"

Rana faintly gasped the name, an icy chill striking to her heart as she saw the face against the grating.

Harold clinched his hands and stood on the defensive, one arm about the trembling girl he loved.

The eyes of the two men met, and there seemed an evil, triumphant glitter in those of the Indian.

"White man much ketch," he observed, in a low tone. "What do in that place?"

Rana uttered an exclamation of amazement, staring in wonder at the speaker.

"It can't be—it isn't Mahoor!" she faintly cried.

The man outside shook his head.

"Me Ongo Phal," he declared. "Much big snake-charmer Mahoor be crook black-skin; live with Jaipur. Ha! No good!" And the dusky-faced fellow made a gesture of disgust.

"It is not one of Jaipur's servants!" exclaimed the girl, with increasing wonder.

The man beyond the grating drew himself up proudly.

"Ongo Phal nobody servant," was his haughty assertion. "Ongo Phal great magician—snake-charmer. Me know Jaipur—hate him! Some time get square! Ha!"

He was very emphatic, and there seemed little doubt that he really meant what he said.

Harold, however, was in no way pleased by the appearance of the dark-faced fellow. He wondered how Ongo Phal had found his way into that cellar.

"He is in with Barret, if he is no friend

of Dundal Wombo—he is our enemy, Rana!" cried the young man.

"Ongo Phal have no friends here," asserted the heathen. "He go by him own hook."

"But how did you come here? That is what I cannot understand."

The dusky-face smiled.

"Easy to explain."

"Then explain it."

"Ongo Phal know secret passage."

"A secret passage?"

"Bet you."

"Where? I do not understand."

"Come into cellar. White man own place know not much about it. Ha!"

But Harold was not ready to trust the black fellow.

"I believe he is trying to deceive us for some reason."

Rana had been listening eagerly to every word, and she now spoke to Ongo Phal in his own language, causing the snake-charmer to utter an exclamation of astonishment.

For the next few minutes the girl and the man outside the grating talked swiftly, the excitement of both increasing with every word.

Harold was uneasy, for he could not understand, and he feared the treacherous heathen would play some kind of a trick on them.

After a short time, Rana turned to her companion, her face glowing with hope.

"Ongo Phal is the friend of the man Jaipur followed from India to this country," she said. "He is an old enemy to the Tiger Rajah, and so we can trust him."

"I am not so sure of that," faltered Harold.

"Do you hesitate now?"

"Well, I suppose our condition can be little worse than it is at the present moment, and if you have no fear this creature will betray you to his own race, it is not the place for me to hesitate. What does he propose?"

"He will set us free, if we accompany him to his master."

"That means he will take us straight to Mr. Dundal Wombo."

"I am sure not."

"They will lie so! He may be deceiving you all the time."

"You are far too suspicious. If I trust him, why shouldn't you? Come!" Harold gave in at this.

"I am ready."

The girl spoke a few words to the snake-charmer, who was waiting patiently outside the grating.

At that moment Ongo Phal started, his sharp ears having heard a very suspicious sound.

"White men come!" he hissed. "Lose not a jiff! Get out big quick hurry!"

Then his dark fingers removed the bar and threw back the bolts that held the heavy door.

Harold realized the heathen had made no mistake, for he could hear the sound of some one approaching.

Out of the cellar dungeon hurried the prisoners, Harold limping painfully, but keeping his teeth set with the grim determination not to falter no matter how severe was the pain he felt.

Ongo Phal caught the hand of the girl and hurried her across the cellar into the darkness of one corner.

"Scrouch!" he whispered in her ear. "Look out, bump um head. Git in right away soon."

She obeyed the command, putting out her hands and feeling that she was entering a dark and narrow passage, where the walls were dank and unpleasant to the touch.

The sound of harsh voices could be heard in the cellar, and Harold recognized one of the speakers as Barret, the brutal proprietor of the hotel.

A wave of fury surged through the breast of the young man, and he ground his teeth, feeling a strong desire to turn back and attack the landlord.

It almost seemed that Ongo Phal could read the thoughts of the other despite the darkness, for his clammy hand fell on Harold's wrist, where his fingers closed in a chilling grip, and he hissed:

"Come! No be fool! Get away right off quick; white man not be able to follow—not

know where have gone. You like girl great big heap? Think of her. Stop an fool, git in much trouble."

This was logic, and the young man knew it, so he allowed Ongo Phal to urge him into the passage.

A moment the dusky guide paused to listen.

Barret and his companion were in the cellar, as their voices plainly betrayed. They immediately approached the place where the captives had been confined.

"Wonder if our birds are all right?" were the words which came to the ears of the fugitives, spoken by the villainous hotel-keeper.

Ongo Phal partially closed the secret passage, still leaving it open enough so they could hear what passed in the cellar.

"Course they're all right," returned the voice of the ruffian Jake. "You've got a snug hole here, mate. It's tighter than Sing Sing, an' once you git a cove shet up—"

He was interrupted by a cry of fury from Barret.

"The door's open!"

Then the two men were heard tearing around and uttering violent language.

"They're gone!" roared Barret. "A thousand curses on the luck!"

"They must be here, pardy!"

"But they ain't! They're gone!"

"Where?"

"You tell!"

"They must be in the cellar!"

"That's so; they couldn't git out. Let's make a ho. hunt for them. Lively!"

"Look out fer that young whelp! He's a holy terror!"

"Right! He'll fight like a tiger. Ready with yer gun, mate! Shoot him if he kicks up rusty!"

Rana's arms slipped around Harold, and she whispered:

"Let's get away! Oh, what a narrow escape! They would have killed you!"

"Ha!" came the sibilant whisper of Ongo Phal. "No like young Yank—not much. I get him out of bad scrape. Now trust me."

Then he completely closed the secret passage.

"How can we see where we are going?" questioned Harold.

"No want to see—feel," returned the strange rescuer. "Can only go one way."

"There are no traps—no pitfalls?"

"You trust Ongo Phal now. If no, then can go back."

"We must trust him," murmured Rana, her lips close to the ear of her lover.

Harold knew this was right, but he resolved to be on the guard for treachery from Ongo Phal, for he had no confidence in the heathen, knowing well there was not one of the race who would consider it wrong to deceive a white-skin.

So they felt their way along the passage, which was plainly the work of man, as it was supported in places by rotten timbers, and there seemed danger that it would cave in at any moment.

The young man was filled with wonder at the thought that the passage should be there and still not be known to Barret. Then he remembered that the present proprietor of the hotel had not owned it more than two years, and that there were some very singular stories about the place before it came into his possession. It was said to be haunted by the ghost of a girl who was murdered there.

The hotel had been built on the site of an old Revolutionary house, and Harold realized the passage was possibly constructed by the owner of the original house, being dug so he could conceal himself and family from foes who might capture the place.

This seemed like a reasonable solution; but still it was singular Ongo Phal should know of the secret way.

At length, the heathen halted.

"Stop here," he said, in a low tone. "No can go further."

"Is this the end of the passage?" asked Harold.

"Yes."

"But we are still underground."

"Yes."

"How do we get out?"

"Ongo Phal know. Don't worry 'bout dat. But must be care'. No want to be see when go out."

"I should say not."

"Keep still. I open rock door now and take peek. All right, we go out; all wrong, we keep much still."

A moment later, a ray of light shone into the passage, and they saw Ongo Phal peering forth at the head of some decayed wooden steps.

"Coast clear," he said. "Come out right off quick, nobody ketch 'um. Now."

He opened the entrance wide, and they immediately mounted the steps and climbed out into the open air.

They found themselves beside a great rock in the thick woods that ran down close to the hotel.

Onga Phal came out and restored the tipping flat stone to its usual position, so the entrance to the secret passage was closed.

"Well, this is simply wonderfull!" muttered Harold. "Who would have dreamed this old passage, probably constructed in Revolutionary times, was there?"

"No time to chin," came guardedly from the lips of the heathen. "Can walk well?"

Harold thought of his ankle, now throbbing with pain, but promptly replied:

"I can walk, if I must."

"Must, then. Stay here some, men in cellar come out to hunt—be found. Ha! Me guess Yank no like that some great lot. You lame? Git on big brace."

The heathen had caught the slang of the country, and Harold was forced to smile.

"Lead the way," said the young man.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE TRIUMPHANT SNAKE-CHARMER.

WHILE Barret and his ruffianly comrade were vainly and furiously searching in the cellar, their late captives were making their way from the vicinity of the hotel as fast as Harold's sprained ankle would permit.

Although the pain was great, the young man resolutely set his teeth and tramped on, never thinking of making a complaint or uttering a sound.

But love was not blind in this case at least, and Rena was well aware how much he was suffering, for she repeatedly expressed her sympathy.

"Let's stop and rest," she urged.

Harold shook his head.

"We must not," he said. "This is a dangerous vicinity for us now, as Barret will be doubly desperate, knowing we can bring charges against him that will put him in a hard hole. Should he overtake us, there is no telling what crime his dastardly nature might lead him to commit."

Ongo Phal said not a word, but he nodded his head and grunted in a way that showed he approved of Harold's view.

"But your ankle," murmured Rena. "It will give out, and we shall be unable to proceed."

"It will give out much sooner if we stop now, sweetheart. Don't think of that. It is not very bad, anyway."

She knew he did not tell the truth, for his face was pale and his lips pressed together. However, no more was said on this point, and they followed their now silent guide.

Ongo Phal avoided the highways as much as possible, and he took good care not to be seen by any one.

For at least two miles they tramped, and then they approached a pretty little cottage set back in a charming glen. The cottage was overrun with a flowering vine, and it looked like an ideal summer retreat.

Harold recognized the spot, for he had heard it remarked that the cottage was owned by a wealthy New Yorker who appeared very mysterious and whose true name was not known to the people of that locality.

The young man's curiosity was thoroughly aroused, and he wondered if they were to meet the owner of the cottage and who he would turn out to be if they did meet him.

However, the cottage seemed deserted, and Harold suddenly came to a halt, saying:

"I don't know about going in there."

"You come," urged Ongo Phal. "Him be all right."

"I am not so sure of that."

"You promise."

"When?"

"In cellar."

"I don't remember it."

The heathen made a gesture of impatience.

"White man memory need stretchin'," he observed, somewhat contemptuously. "I say I take you out if you come to my master; you say all right. You be took out. Now you keep your word—ha?"

Rana's hand was on Harold's arm.

"Of course you will come," she said, in a low tone. "I am sure you do not fear to go where I will venture?"

The young man flushed, bit his lip a moment, and then motioned for Ongo Phal to go on.

"We will follow you," came coldly from his lips; "but you want to beware of treachery. I am on my guard."

The heathen nodded, as if he were satisfied, and then they followed him into the house.

Harold kept his eyes wide open, for he was acutely suspicious, and he did not mean to be caught napping.

The snake-charmer produced a key and unlocked a door of the cottage, but the young man would not enter until the heathen had preceded them.

Something like a derisive smile flitted across the dusky face of the guide, but he did not hesitate about leading the way into the mysterious cottage.

As soon as the trio were fairly inside, the door seemed to close of its own accord, and there was a sharp click that plainly told it had locked.

Ongo Phal led the way, and the others followed into a dark room, where the vines at the window kept out a great deal of light. The vines also prevented Harold from noting the window was barred.

Again the door closed with a click behind them.

"Set," invited the guide, shortly. "Make both umself comfort. Good chair."

Rana immediately sat down, completely exhausted by what she had passed through, but Harold, still suspicious, declined to sit.

"Where is your master?" he asked.

"Not be here now," replied the snake charmer.

"Not here?"

"No."

"Where is he?"

"Out."

"Then why did you bring us here? We have no time to waste in these parts. We must get away."

The heathen made an odd gesture that Harold did not like, for it seemed to say they could not go until he permitted them.

"No quick rush."

"What do you mean?" demanded the young man, sharply.

Ongo Phal shook his head.

"Why should hurry? Ev'thing comfort some great lot here. Take it easy, white man. My master come right away before some time."

This angered Harold.

"We cannot spend our time waiting for him. Do you know when he will return?"

"No."

"It may be a long time?"

"Mebbe long; mebbe short. Can't tell."

"And you expect us to hang around this ranch on such an uncertainty? If so, you have made an error, my dusky friend. You did us a good turn, and we are willing to pay you well. How much?"

"Take some fall down to yourself!" contemptuously and rather indignantly cut in the snake-charmer. "You don't get to play the—the roots on me like dat! I no get you out for some pay. My master show me dat passage in the ground. He be here for reason. He not like Barret some great lump, you bet me anything! I go there in the hole—I find you. Ha! I not ask for pay to take you out. You try to give pay, I get right up on this—what you call um?" and the heathen touched his ear with his finger.

Ongo Phal's manner showed he was in earnest, and Harold looked at the strange fellow searchingly, trying to fathom his thoughts. This was impossible, for the dusky face was unreadable.

The young man was not at all pleased with the situation, for although Rana had assured him Ongo Phal was not one of Jaipur's servants, he feared the girl was

mistaken and they had been led into a trap. Perhaps they were awaiting the arrival of Dundal Wombo.

"I do not propose to stay in this gloomy room and wait for your master," declared Harold.

"Not stay here?"

"No."

"Where go?"

"Out."

Again the heathen shook his head, this time in a most decisive manner.

"Can't go," he declared.

"Why not?"

"I say so."

Harold laughed.

"What are you? Do you think you can stop us?"

"Know it."

"We'll see!"

The young man was about to stride toward the dusky rascal when Rana's hand fell on his arm with a detaining clasp, and her eyes looked appealingly into his.

"Don't!" she entreated. "I am sure he does not mean us harm."

"Well, I am not sure of that—not at all. I do not fancy being cooped up here, and I am going out. You will go with me, sweetheart, and our friend here shall open the door."

Ongo Phal had placed his back against the door, his small black eyes eagerly watching every move. He did not seem at all excited on account of the threatened assault.

"Why should you make trouble with him?" whispered Rana. "Don't do it. He is dangerous."

She could not have said anything that would have made Harold more determined to have his way.

"Dangerous!" he laughed. "Do you imagine I fear that shriyed up old wretch?"

"He is a snake charmer."

"What of that?"

"They are deadly."

"Why, I can break him in my hands!"

"You think so."

"Think! You shall see if he does not promptly open the door. Sit down, dearest, and watch me handle this fellow."

Then he wheeled on Ongo Phal.

"Open that door!"

Another shake of the dusky head.

"Pretty soon bimeby when my master come."

"Open it now!"

"No."

Harold took a long stride forward, but Ongo Phal simply flung up one claw-like hand.

"Stop, white man!" he commanded, in a way that brought Harold to an abrupt halt, despite himself. "I am great magician. In my own country people take care not to get Ongo Phal mad. They know him have power to kill right away sudden. If white man put one finger on Ongo Phal, he get hit pretty hard right where him live."

The words were uttered with an impressiveness that affected the young man in spite of himself. The heathen's eyes seemed to glitter ominously, and there was a strange tumbling motion beneath the garment that covered his breast.

Harold forced a laugh.

"Why, any one would really imagine you dangerous to hear you now!" he said. "And I believe I can knock the breath of life out of your body with a single blow."

"No hit."

"Why not?"

"You be stopped."

"How?"

"Way you no like great heap."

"Bah! I believe you think to intimidate me with threats. If so, you have struck the wrong man. Open that door!"

Not another word did Ongo Phal utter, but he made no move to obey.

Rana saw something in his eyes that caused her to spring to her feet and once more catch the arm of her lover.

"Please!" she entreated.

He gently flung off her hand, and an other stride was taken toward the heathen.

But he halted suddenly, an exclamation of astonishment and alarm escaping from his lips.

Out from the breast of Ongo Phal was thrust the head of a serpent, and the crea-

ture uttered a hiss that seemed to betoken its anger was aroused.

The heathen uttered no word, but there was a look of triumph in his beady eyes. He knew he commanded the situation, for the white man would not dare touch him now the snake had made its presence known.

There had been no struggle, and yet Harold was baffled.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE MASKED MYSTERY.

The young man stared at the serpent like one turned to stone.

Rana sprung forward again, almost shrieking:

"The cobra—the hooded cobra! It will kill you if you touch it! Keep back!"

"Little danger of my touching it," asserted Harold, huskily. "Ugh! What an ugly creature!"

"I told you Ongo Phal was dangerous. All snake-charmers are dangerous."

Ongo Phal look out some great heap for number once if he have no snake," asserted the triumphant heathen. "Him be magician—some bully big boy, bet you!"

This honest boast was made with perfect sobriety, as if the little wretch felt himself able to cope successfully with Harold even though he had not possessed the serpent. He could well afford to stand on his dignity and utter a few boasts, for he was the victor.

The cobra waved its head from side to side, as if it were looking for a victim, and Harold involuntarily fell back.

With perfect coolness, the snake-charmer carefully took hold of the creature and returned it to his bosom, where it was concealed from view.

"Snake not hurt so long as Ongo Phal not be hurt," was his assurance. "No be afraid of snake, white man. Ha! You talk brave some not great time 'go; now your face get big lot pale."

The young man immediately flushed, for he felt it must be true he had paled when he saw the serpent.

"You shall pay for this, you confounded rascal!" he declared, with heat.

"No call Ongo Phal name," advised the snake-charmer. "It don't be what give you great deal health."

"Do not anger him!" entreated Rana, who seemed to stand in the greatest fear of the triumphant heathen. "There is no telling what he will do if he is aroused."

The snake-charmer nodded his approval at this, as if she had spoken something very wise.

"If I had a weapon!" grated the young man, his face now flushed with anger. "This is an outrage!"

These words had no effect on Ongo Phal, and Harold demanded:

"What do you propose to do?"

"Keep you here till master come."

"You shall suffer for this!"

"Have white man forget Ongo Phal get him out of heap much scrape?"

Harold had forgotten it for the time, and he did not fancy being reminded of it then.

"I offered to pay you."

"If 'noder white man offer to pay you for such, you be some insult—you fight. Why that not work with me—ha? You answer dat."

With a smothered exclamation, the young man whirled away and hurried to the window, where, for the first time, he discovered it was securely barred.

"We are trapped!" he grated—"fairly trapped! I tell you, Rana, Dundal Wombo is at the bottom of this!"

Her face was now very pale, and she seemed in doubt, although she still tried to assure him he could not be right on that point.

"You will see when the master of this black dog comes. We have fallen into a worse scrape than when we were imprisoned in the cellar. The Stranglers will have their sport with us after all."

At this moment, a little bell hung up against the ceiling gave forth a tingle that startled them.

"My master have come," asserted Ongo Phal. "You wait. He be here right off soon."

Then he put his lips to a speaking tube near the door and called through it.

The temptation was almost too great for Harold to resist. He longed to leap at the magician and hurl him to the floor, for all of the hidden serpent. He might have attempted it, but Rana seemed to comprehend what was passing in his mind, and she held him back with a firm grasp, whispering:

"We shall know the worst very soon."

"And then it will be too late! How foolish I was to enter this place with you, sweetheart! Great Heaven! if it proves to be Dundal Wombo; what will be your fate?"

"Don't think of me."

His arm went round her, and he looked about the room for some weapon of defense. A chair was the only thing he could see, and he moved to a spot near that, so he could catch it up in a moment.

"If I have to fight, do not hamper me, dear," he whispered. "Give me room to swing this chair."

"If you have to fight, you may be sure I shall render all the assistance possible."

"Brave little soul!"

His sprained ankle was completely forgotten, for such things claimed his attention now that he could give it no thought.

Ongo Phal had been speaking through the tube, and he now turned to observe:

"Not my master; do jest well, all same."

"Who is it?"

"Wait. See soon."

Scarcely were the words uttered when the door was flung open and the person with whom the heathen had been conversing entered the room.

A woman!

Tall and finely formed, dressed in costly clothes, with diamonds flashing from her person, she made a striking appearance.

But what astonished Harold and Rana the most was the fact that her face was completely hidden by a black mask, through twin holes in which glowed her eyes.

She advanced fearlessly into the room, paused and surveyed the young man and the girl.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," she declared, her voice being musical and pleasant.

"I am not sure it is a pleasure so far as we are concerned," returned the young man, haughtily.

"It should be a pleasure to meet me," half laughed the masked woman.

"Who are you?"

"I see you are inquisitive. Possibly I may not choose to answer that question."

"Why did you have us brought here?"

"I had nothing to do with it I assure you. Ongo Phal will have to explain it."

"Gal be from Jaipur," said the snake-charmer, with an air of great deference. "She talk my language—tell me she live with him some great big time."

The masked female surveyed Rana with interest.

"Then you are the mysterious girl who has been seen with him? I have wondered who you could be. You are not of his blood—I am sure of that. He is no relation of yours. Although your face has a dusky tinge, I do not believe there is black blood in your veins. How in the world did you come to be with a creature like Jaipur, the Tiger?"

"He has cared for me a very great time. He was a friend of my father's, and my father was a white man. I have Indian blood in my veins, for my mother was a daughter of Bhawalpur, the pirate, as he was called by the English."

The mask shook her head.

"Who has told you this?"

"Jaipur."

"He lied."

This was said very quietly but with an air of positive decision.

"Lied?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"Bhawalpur never had a daughter."

Rana was amazed.

"You know this—you are sure?"

"I am. He had a son that once dressed as a girl to escape being killed by the English, who had some respect for sex, even though it were a descendant of the hated pirate who had murdered so many of the white-

skins; but the fellow never had an acknowledged daughter."

Rana was amazed by this declaration, but she wondered how it came about that this masked mystery knew so much of the man she had always considered her grandfather.

The woman seemed to understand her astonishment, for she went on:

"It happens that I know the minutest history of Bhawalpur, for I have had reasons to find out about him. If he had been the father of a daughter, he would not have denied it, that is certain, so you can no longer consider yourself a descendant of the pirate."

"But who was my mother?"

"That I cannot tell. I suppose you have a feeling of affection for Jaipur?"

"I hate him!"

"Hate him?" echoed the woman in astonishment. "Why should you hate him?"

The girl told her story, and the masked mystery listened with the greatest attention and apparent interest. She soon understood why Rana bore no love for the Tiger Rajah.

"Ongo Phal did a good thing in bringing you here," was her declaration. "You say you will never be safe so long as Jaipur is in this country, and you know the secrets of his den. My husband and myself are the undying enemies of this man, and it is our object to drive him from this country. You can aid us."

"How?"

"By telling us all the secrets of his you know—by telling us how to get into his den and thus to reach him. You cannot consider this wrong, for he is a treacherous creature who will take your life for the fancied wrong you have done him. Will you aid us?"

Rana hesitated.

"What shall I do, Harold?" she asked.

"If you think this strange woman is honest in her pretended hatred, aid her—on one condition."

"What is that?"

"That we are immediately set free and provided with horses to take us to the nearest railway station."

But when this proposal was made known to the woman, it was not regarded favorably.

"What if this girl should take a fancy to warn Jaipur?" was her question. "You see I have no assurance. What can I do?"

"Trust us," advised Harold.

"The woman shook her head.

"You are lovers," she said. "I can plainly see that. Do you intend to get married?"

At first the young man was tempted to resent the question, but he resisted the impulse, replying with all the dignity he could command.

"Of course we do!"

"How soon?"

"At the earliest convenience."

"What if I aid you?"

"How?"

"By furnishing you horses to reach a parson?"

"Your kindness would be appreciated."

"Would you consent to return here?"

The lovers consulted. Young Trench could understand the doubts in the mind of the masked woman, and began to believe she meditated no harm to them. However, he was not ready to return to that cottage if it could be avoided—not even with Rana as his bride. This he made known to the woman.

"Very well," was the quiet reply. "Then I shall be forced to keep you here as prisoners."

It was useless to rebel against this, for Harold was unarmed, and he realized how completely they were in the power of the masked female.

"If we consent to your terms, will you give us your pledge no harm shall come to either of us?" he asked.

"I will."

"We consent."

"Very good. The horses shall be ordered at once, and Ongo Phal will accompany you as your escort. It is settled."

CHAPTER XXXII.

A MARRIAGE AND A TRAGEDY.

It was necessary for the heathen to procure horses from a distance, as there was but one animal at the hidden cottage, and

nightfall had arrived when he returned with them.

In the mean time, Harold and Rana had been treated with the utmost courtesy by their hostess. They were provided with a very good lunch, which was served by a colored servant who mysteriously appeared on the scene.

The strange woman kept much from their sight, although they were aware she was constantly near at hand.

Harold tried the doors to make sure they were not locked, but they opened at his touch, and it seemed that they might walk from the cottage unmolested. This did much to restore his confidence and ease.

Just before the horses were brought, the strange woman's husband appeared, but he was also masked, and he scarcely spoke three words, although Harold fancied he looked at him in a singularly searching manner.

The mystery of the house and the people who occupied it was rather oppressive, but they made themselves as easy as possible, feeling there was nothing else to be done.

The masked woman came and told them they should start as soon as it was fairly dark. This suited them, for there was less danger that they would be seen by Dundal Wombo or his satellites if the journey were made under cover of darkness.

Despite their situation and the dangers they had passed through, both were happy, for, unless some unforeseen event occurred, it now appeared certain they would soon be man and wife.

The time passed swiftly, for they were left much by themselves, and time never flies so fast as when lovers are together.

At length, the woman came and announced that everything was ready for the journey.

A short time later, they were in the open air, where stood Ongo Phal with three restless horses.

It cannot be truthfully said either Harold or Rana were pleased with the idea of having such an escort, but they did not demur, for it was too late for anything of the sort.

A short distance away, partly hidden by the darkness, stood a tall figure that Harold recognized as the husband of the mysterious woman. Looking closer, he discovered a horse still further in the background.

"Ha!" thought the young man. "They're not going to trust entirely to Ongo Phal. That man will follow us."

But he was wrong. The strange man was bound in quite a different direction, for he had an engagement that he felt must be kept that night.

Harold assisted Rana to mount, and then he swung himself into the saddle, accepting the horse signaled out for him by the snake-charmer. A few moments later the trio were riding slowly out toward the main road, Ongo Phal leading the way.

The night was murk with shredded clouds, through which the stars peered at intervals. The open air was grateful to the lovers after the time they had spent in the mysterious cottage.

Ongo Phal was not inclined to talk a great deal. Once or twice he turned to say a word, but, for the most part, he kept straight on, knowing they were following closely.

Somehow Harold felt sure the termination of the adventure was to be anything but pleasant, but he did not impart his fears to Rana, thinking it might be because his nerves were not as steady as they ought to be.

They were no more than fairly on their way, however, when he regretted he had not asked their mysterious friends for weapons, as he could not throw off the sensation of approaching danger.

"Why are you so silent?" asked Rana, pouting in the darkness. "One would almost think you regretted this hasty step. If so—"

"Please 'don't!' he hastily entreated. "How can you imagine such a thing, sweet-heart?"

"Well, why don't you say something?"

"I was thinking."

"Of what—me?"

"Of the astonishing adventures through which we have passed, and how strange it is we have been befriended by such mysterious people. Do you know there seems to be something familiar about that man?"

"Really?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps he is some one you know. Wouldn't it be surprising if it should turn out he is a close acquaintance?"

"It would certainly be surprising, but I do not think it possible."

"Why not?"

"Because I have run over my list of close acquaintances, and I cannot place him."

"Still it may be some one you have not thought of."

"No, I fancy not. And yet I feel that he and I are connected in some way."

"How about the woman?"

"That is different. I am not impressed in that way with regard to her!"

"You do not think you have seen her before?"

"I may have seen her before, but she does not affect me the same as the man. I would give a great deal to look behind his mask and take a fair survey of the face hidden there."

"Perhaps you may have a chance soon."

"I may. It would not be strange. Nothing that can happen will seem very strange after what has occurred."

Ongo Phal suddenly turned in the saddle.

"Not so much talk," he advised. "My ear have to be open same great lot. Talk stop it very much tight."

"You do not think there is danger?" questioned Rana.

"Never be able to tell 'bout dat. Danger may be all round. Jaipur have a great way of getting round a great big lot."

So they rode onward in silence, not saying much of anything after this.

The snake charmer had the best horse of the three, and, though he stuck to the animal like a burr, he rounded up in a most undignified and unsightly manner. As they looked at him through the gloom, he scarcely seemed like a human being.

For all of the beating of the horses' hoofs on the hard road-bed along which they were riding, the heathen was able to detect any unusual sound, even though it were faint and came from a great distance.

Twice he halted suddenly and cautioned them to be perfectly quiet, while he listened. Once he got down and put his ear to the ground.

These alarms were of no special consequence, and they went on without being molested.

They passed many cottages and little houses where the lights were out and all the inmates seemed wrapped in slumber. It was a lonely and deserted road, and both Harold and Rana felt the influence of the solitude.

Occasionally they would pass a cottage from the window of which gleamed a light, and it made their hearts feel lighter when they did so.

Several times Harold tried to detect if any one were following them, but they seemed the only persons astir on that desolate highway.

"How much further have we to go?" the young man finally asked.

Ongo Phal did not seem to hear, and the question was repeated, at which he turned to reply.

"Not fur now. Keep cool and let um hair twist. Me know my biz, you bet a little big pile!"

For ten or fifteen minutes more they rode forward; and then they turned into the yard of a little house that stood back from the road. The house was dark, but the snake-charmer observed

"Some big splicer live here; he hitch you togeder right off sudden. Have to call him up. You do the chin. He might not like the way he hear Ongo Phal's voice, mebbe."

They rode to the door, and Harold dismounted. Then he strode up the step, quite forgetting to limp in his eagerness, and rapped in a way that echoed through the house.

The rap was soon repeated, and then a window was flung up directly over the door, and a voice called.

"Who is there at this hour when Christian people should be in their beds?"

"We are quite harmless," assured the young man, "and we only arouse you because we need your services."

"What do you want?"

"We want to get married."

"Hey? You do?" cried the man at the window. "Well, I don't know about that! This is a singular time to get married. Why don't you come to-morrow?"

"It will not be convenient for us to put it off so long."

"Hum! Elopement, eh? I can't countenance elopements. Go right home to your parents, that is my advice."

"That would be all right if either of us had any parents to go to, but we have not. We are not eloping, and you need have no hesitation about marrying us. It will be a twenty-five dollar job."

"Eh? Twenty-five dollars? I'll be right down!"

In went the head; slam! went the window.

Harold laughed softly.

"That twenty-five brought him."

"Money do a heap sight of talk," sagely remarked Ongo Phal, speaking through his nose, as if muttering to himself. Then he dismounted and proceeded to hitch the horses, Harold having assisted Rana to the ground.

They did not have a great time to wait. Lights glowed in the house and footsteps approached the door, which was flung open.

"Come in—come in out of the night," invited a long, thin-faced man.

No time was lost in obeying, and the door soon closed behind the trio. The man led them to the rather bare parlor, saying

"My wife and daughter will soon be down to witness the ceremony. It takes them rather longer to dress than myself."

He was scarcely more than half dressed, but he made no apologies, his eyes eagerly regarding the young man and Rana.

"You are a minister of the Gospel?" asked Harold.

"I am."

"And you are licensed to marry people?"

"Yes."

"Then get the ceremony over as soon as possible, for we have come a long distance and must return immediately."

"You can remain beneath this roof to-night for—for a consideration," ventured the greedy parson.

This offer was declined, and soon the wife and daughter appeared. Then Harold and the girl he loved stood up and joined hands, while the lanky parson went through the ceremony of making them one.

Barely were they pronounced man and wife when the door of the house was burst open with a crash, and a man came leaping in.

One glance showed the bride and bridegroom that they were found by the Tiger Rajah, for the man was Jaipur himself, and at his heels were several of his black servants.

"Ha! I have you!" shouted the Tiger, with fierce satisfaction. "Your horses were swift, but Jaipur's feet are tireless, and they make no noise."

Harold sprung before the girl who was now his wife, while the minister and his family shrunk back in terror, their faces pallid.

"Back!" cried the young man. "You shall not touch her!"

With a wild laugh, Jaipur snatched out a pistol and shot him down.

Uttering a shriek, Rana flung herself across the body of her husband.

"Murdered!" she gasped; and then she felt herself clutched by the merciless hands of the Tiger Rajah!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ON THE TRAIL.

FIRE-EYE escaped without a scratch after he had leaped through the window. He lost no time in getting away from the vicinity, for he knew the deceived rustlans would be hot after him.

"Well, I did not learn as much as I might but for the unfortunate appearance of 'The Clincher,'" he thought; "but I have learned a few things of interest, and that is a certain fact. The most important is that Warren Trench is not dead, although he is supposed to be. How the trick was worked is a mystery."

He crouched down in the darkness under cover of some bushes, and saw his enemies searching madly for him, uttering the most violent language.

Prince laughed to himself.

"You were badly fooled, and you feel mightily cut up over it. Well, I don't wonder."

He waited until the disturbed rascals had quieted down in a measure, but he saw they were on their guard, suspecting he might be lurking near, and so he gave over the thought of playing the eavesdropper on them.

"It is not likely they would say anything of importance, knowing I might be close by to hear it," was his thought. "I shall waste my time if I hang around here any longer.

"I will hasten back to the hotel and see if I can solve the mystery of Harold Trench and his sister's disappearance. I fear they have fallen into the hands of Dundal Wombo. If this is true, their situation is desperate."

He made his way noiselessly through the wood, and it was not later than eleven o'clock when he reached the main road.

Prince was trudging steadily toward Barrett's when he suddenly halted and listened.

From far away down the road came the clatter of horses' hoofs.

"Hello!" muttered the detective. "I wonder who is riding at that pace this night?"

The sounds came nearer, and, as he listened, he discovered there were more horses than one.

"There are several of them, and they are in a hurry. That means something."

As the horsemen approached, Prince slipped to the side of the road and crouched down in the darkness beside a large rock.

Clatter, clatter, clatter came the horses down the road, and the detective peered forth eagerly.

Pretty soon three horses passed, and the hidden ferret stared with astonishment when he saw the burdens they bore. Two of the horses carried double, for their riders held forms in their arms that looked like human beings. The third was ridden by a single person.

The darkness prevented the detective from scrutinizing the features of the riders.

"Great Scott!" muttered Fire-Eye, as the riders continued down the road. "I would give something to know the meaning of that. I believe two of those people were helpless captives."

He walked out into the road, and then his keen eyes detected a dark form that came running swiftly toward him with the light footsteps of a panther.

"A pursuer—and on foot!" thought the ferret. "What does this mean?"

He fancied he saw a means of ascertaining the truth, and he immediately dashed upon the runner, whom he grasped in a firm clutch, exclaiming:

"Hold on a little, my friend! I have a few questions to ask you."

"Let um go!" panted a voice that seemed familiar to Fire-Eye. "In some great hurry."

"I see you are; but I want to ask you a few questions, my man."

"No time for chin. Let gol!" and the other tried to tear himself away.

Fire-Eye held fast, peering into the face of the man he had stopped.

"I believe I know you!" he cried.

"White man not know Ongo Phal."

"Ongo Phal! Well, you bet I know him! Have you forgotten me?"

The snake-charmer—for it was the heathen—peered back into the face of the detective, and then he uttered a sudden cry:

"Now I know um! You great white magic man!"

"Right you are, my dusky friend. I scarcely thought of finding you here."

"Me no thought I see you. How you come to be round a great heap in this place?"

"That is too long a story to tell now, Ongo. What I want to know is what you are doing here."

"Have biz. Follow bad man, see?"

"I saw you following them."

"Let go! Lose 'um!"

"Who are they?"

"Jaipur, the Tiger, and his men."

"What?"

"It is true."
"What are they doing here?"
"Can't stop to tell."
"You must. There is no can't about it in this case."

The snake-charmer made a gesture of despair.
"Then I lose 'um!"

"Without doubt they are going to Jaipur's house."
"Mebbe."

"Then you shall not lose them."
"You know where it be?"
"Sure."

"Mebbe they not go there."
"Well, it is already too late to follow them, so you may as well tell me what I want to know."

Ongo Phal hesitated but a moment more, for he was controlled by the superior will of the detective. Then he hastily told all that is known to the reader concerning the rescue of Harold and Rana from the cellar of the hotel and the adventures that followed.

Fire-Eye listened with all the calmness he could command, but he realized Harold and Rana were in a very bad scrape and it was necessary to make some move toward getting them out without delay.

"Look here, Ongo Phal," he said, speaking swiftly, "I want you to do as I direct. Do you understand?"

"Bet you."
"Very well. This young man and girl are friends of mine, and I shall make an attempt to save them."

"Good!"
"Does your master know where Jaipur's retreat is located?"

"Yes."
"Then you must get him word what has happened as soon as possible. As he is the Tiger's enemy, he may be able to assist me. Do you understand?"

"Ongo Phal not thick head."
"Very well. If your master is not at home, tell your mistress. Will you?"

"Cert."
"In the mean time, I will follow Dundal Wombo to his stone house and try to find a way of getting inside. I shall do this regardless of any peril I may run, and if your master or mistress acts promptly, I may be able to save the necks of the captives."

"What you want 'um do?"
"Come to the stone house immediately with as large a force as they can muster, and have every man ready to fight, for there will surely be trouble."

"Bet you! Jaipur be bad!"
"I have been into the Tiger's den once, and I know the lay of the land. Without doubt, I shall be found there, dead or alive."

"No kill you," asserted the heathen.
"Why not?"

"You much big magician—play 'um magic on Jaipur—knock him 'way out."

"Well, I will do my best. Now do not lose a moment. Get!"

The snake-charmer promptly obeyed, while Fire-Eye started on a steady run toward the Old Fort.

The detective's mind was in a tumult of emotions, for the very thing he had feared most had happened—the girl was once more in the power of Dundal Wombo.

"If he harms either of them in the least, he shall suffer!" grated Prince, as he ran steadily onward.

The detective was a tireless runner, and he set a pace he knew he could keep up.

As soon as possible, he left the main road and struck across toward the Old Fort, plunging fearlessly into the dark woods. He was able to keep his course in a remarkable manner, and not a moment of time or a foot of ground was lost in reaching his destination.

At length, he came to the opening in the forest, in the midst of which stood the Old Fort, dark, forbidding, gloomy and silent.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

JAIPUR PRONOUNCES HAROLD'S DOOM.

"How am I to get in there?" thought Fire-Eye. "It is true I did so once, but I shall scarcely have such fortune again. They will be on their guard."

"Well, here goes for a try," and he darted along till he came to the place where he had scaled the wall once before. There he

paused to listen a few seconds, but everything seemed silent and deserted within the inclosure.

A sudden great fear came over Prince.

"What if they are not here?" he gasped, beneath his breath. "What if Jaipur was alarmed by my escape and decided to get out immediately? In that case, the captives were not taken here, and I am out of it. By the time I can strike the trail and trace them down it will be too late."

This was not a pleasant thought, and it gave him a desperate feeling.

"Here is to know the truth without delay," he grated.

Then he hastily mounted the wall, crouched flat and wriggled over it, dropping lightly on the other side.

He knew exactly what to do, and so he slipped along toward the point where the sentry had been posted at the gate.

No sentry was there!

"By Heaven! that looks bad!" was the detective's mental exclamation. "If the guard is gone, more than likely the place is deserted!"

Still he was too shrewd to lose his head and become incautious. He surveyed the house, and more than ever the place seemed deserted.

"If this is true, Harold Trench and Rana are lost! I feel guilty for leaving them. If I had remained with them, it is not likely Jaipur would have succeeded in getting them in his clutch again. Well, I—Hark!"

His sharp ears heard the sound of approaching horses.

"What can be the meaning of that? Surely, Ongo Phal has not had time to carry word to Warren Trench or London Bess so they could reach this spot thus soon? No! Then—"

Not another word did he mutter, for a sharp signal whistle came from beyond the gate—the same signal he had heard when he traced the first dark man to that spot.

Immediately the daring detective retreated from the vicinity of the gate.

"By Heaven!" he thought; "I believe I understand it! I have reached this place ahead of Jaipur and his men! They had to go round by the road, which is a long distance, while I cut across without loss of time, and I reached this spot first! What fortune! If I cannot find a way to get into that house now, I am no good!"

The horses came to the very gate and stopped, when the signal was repeated.

A moment later the detective saw a dark figure come from the house and hurry to the gate.

Knowing the man's back was turned and his attention attracted the other way, Fire-Eye darted to the shelter of the house, which he reached easily. There he crouched where he could watch what occurred.

The man who had answered the signal flung open the gate, and then Jaipur and his men rode into the inclosure.

"Sure enough I was right!" was Prince-Bruce's triumphant thought. "This is great fortune!"

He crouched close to the ground, seeing the gate closed, after which the Tiger Rajah rode around to the back of the Old Fort, followed by the others.

They had the captives.

"I am right in it!" flashed through the mind of the daring ferret, as he crept along on his hands and knees and reached an angle of the house where he could look around and watch what occurred.

Jaipur had leaped to the ground, and he had the man who held the girl pass her down to him. Then that man dismounted, after which he took the second captive from his companion.

The Tiger Rajah strode toward the house, followed by his servant, while the third man remained behind to look after the horses.

Fire Eye watched Jaipur as he produced keys and admitted himself and his satchite to the house.

"How am I to follow?" thought Prince, puzzled for the moment. "How is the man they have left behind to follow?"

Listening, he did not hear the door close.

"They have left it open for him!" was the excited thought that flashed through Fire-Eye's brain.

Instantly he arose and darted along the wall of the house toward the door.

When he reached the door, he discovered his surmisal had been correct, for, although it had been swung nearly to, it was not quite closed.

Searcely an instant did Prince Bruce hesitate.

"Here goes!" he softly muttered, and then he noiselessly thrust open the door and slipped into that house of danger.

As soon as he was inside, the detective closed the door to its former position.

He was delighted with his success thus far, for it was even better than he had dared hope.

"Now, where have you taken the captives?" was his mental question. "I do not fancy Jaipur will delay long with his vengeance. If I mistake not, the whelp intends his tiger shall have a feast this night."

Like a cat, he stole through the house, having the advantage of knowing his way quite well.

He had not gone far before the sound of voices coming from a room that opened off the passage attracted his attention. He paused and listened at the door, discovering more than one or two persons were talking within.

"They are here!" was his triumphant thought. "Jaipur is with them. I can understand how he is gloating over his victims. His victims? We shall see!"

A hand fell on the knob of the door, and Fire-Eye immediately darted back, finding a dark nook near the foot of the stairs that led to the chambers. There he crouched.

The knob of the door rattled, telling that the hand was still upon it, but it was some seconds before any one came out. Evidently the person was pausing to give or receive instructions.

At length, the door opened, allowing a broad ray of light to stream out into the passage, and then this person came forth. Prince watched him go down the passage to the back door, which he opened, peering out into the night.

A few seconds later, the man who had been left to care for the horses came to the door and was admitted, after which the door was closed and secured.

"What fortune it was that I came in as I did!" thought the detective, watching the two men as they entered the room where Jaipur had undoubtedly caused the captives to be taken. "Otherwise, I might not have been able to get in at all. I am here now, and I mean to do my level best to save the unfortunates who have fallen into the power of this miserable wretch. If I succeed, Jaipur's time in this country is limited, unless he remains here within prison walls, where he properly belongs."

To the delight of the daring ferret, the door was not tightly closed, as a thin ray of light that shone forth plainly indicated. At once Fire-Eye slipped toward it making scarcely the least noise.

The door was reached, and there the Dread Detective paused to listen. The first voice he heard was Jaipur's, full of triumph and malignant hatred.

"You think to steal her from me, white man?" he was saying. "You did not know the Tiger Rajah!"

"I had no desire to know him," returned Harold Trench, with remarkable coolness.

"Ah! but you shall know him! You shall know how he treats his enemies!"

"I suppose you intend to kill me?"

"Oh, no, no!" laughed the Tiger. "I shall not kill you."

"Then you will leave the job to some of your men?"

"You are wrong."

"Still, I am sure you do not intend to spare me."

"In that you are right—quite right."

"Well, you shall see how a white man can die!"

"Good for the boy!" thought the listening detective. "He has courage, that is sure."

Dundal Wombo uttered an exclamation of disgust and scorn.

"White men are dogs!" he cried, with the utmost contempt. "I spit on them, as I spit on you!"

Fire-Eye heard the young man's voice quiver with suppressed passion, as he returned:

"You spit on them when they are bound and helpless—the act of a cowardly wretch!"

"You dare say that to me!" snarled the Tiger. "You dare say it now?"

"I dare say it any time."

"Oh, well, you have not long to live! I will laugh when I hear you shriek for mercy and see you grovel."

"You will be at liberty to laugh when you do hear me ask mercy of you. Mercy? Why, I would bite my tongue off in my mouth before I would let it utter the word!"

"That is the right kind of stuff!" was Fire-Eye's mental comment. "More than ever I feel that this young man must be saved, for he is made of too good material to die here."

Dundal Wombo was not enjoying his triumph as he expected, and he ground his teeth with chagrin.

"I have forced more than one English dog to put his face in the dust at my feet," he boastfully asserted.

"Well, you are dealing with a Yankee now."

"It is all the same."

"Think so?"

"You are white."

"Ah! but you may find a difference. All men are not alike, Dundal Wombo, and there are Englishmen you could not force to beg or grovel."

"I have not met them; but you Yanks are proud. Once before I found one who defied me, even though he was helpless in my grasp. He escaped me for the time, but I will fix him yet!"

"Perhaps he may be able to 'fix' you," was the detective's mental observation.

Jaipur was angered to an unlimited extent when he found his taunts did not shake the nerve of his captive.

"You are bold, and I believe you actually think I do not mean to harm you at all!" he cried. "You shall soon see!"

"You are quite mistaken in imagining I think such a wretch as you would spare a helpless foe," returned Harold, calmly.

"Do you dream how you must die?"

"I do not care, if die I must."

"Ah! but you will care, for—Listen!"

From beneath the Old Fort came a sullen roar that was quite familiar to the detective.

"You hear it!" cried Jaipur. "I see your cheek pale! You tremble!"

"You lie!"

"Dog! Do you know that sound came from the throat of my executioner?"

There was no reply, and the triumphant heathen went on:

"He is thirsting for a taste of blood, and your eyes cannot stop him, as did those of the cursed detective. You have but one hour to live, and then—"

The wretch paused and regarded Harold with gloating satisfaction, a dancing devil in his beady black eyes.

"Well, what then?"

"You will be thrown into the pit with a half-starved tiger! How do you like the prospect, dog of an American?"

CHAPTER XXXV.

SURPRISING REVELATIONS.

"I BELIEVE I prefer the tiger's company to yours," was the cool reply.

"Well, we shall see. And as for this girl who has turned against me, she has simply shown her blood."

Fire-Eye had wondered if Rana were unconscious, but he now discovered she had her senses, for she returned,

"I do not regret what I have done, Jaipur."

"And you the granddaughter of Bhawalpur!"

"I am not!"

"What?"

"I am not his granddaughter."

Jaipur was astounded and enraged.

"You say that?"

"Yes, I do say it!"

"You deny the blood in your veins?"

"I do not believe there is a drop of black blood in me. You have deceived me—you have lied!"

For a little time it seemed as if the Tiger Rajah would fly into a perfect fury of passion, but he finally restrained himself, forcing an icy laugh.

"I may as well tell you the truth now, for you are not to be spared. I know not how

you discovered it, but you are right—there is no black blood in you."

The girl uttered a cry of joy.

"Thank Heaven!"

"You are pleased," sneered Jaipur. "Well, I am glad. Much good may the knowledge do you!"

"Who was my mother?"

"She was English, but had you proved true to me, you should never have known the truth."

"But why did my father allow me to believe my mother was not a white woman?"

"So you would not scorn me in case anything happened to him. We were friends, for he was the only white man who ever lived that was better than a cur. He saved my life, and I swore eternal friendship for Milton Trench, regardless of his color."

Harold uttered a gasp of amazement.

"Milton Trench!" he cried. "He—he—" "He was my father," said Rana.

"My God! It cannot be true!"

"Why not?"

The helpless young man choked, being unable to utter the words that sought expression. He gazed at Rana with horror in his eyes.

"What is it?" was her wild appeal. "Do not look at me that way! What is the matter?"

"My name is Harold Trench, and Milton Trench was my father!"

Rana seemed stunned. She turned ghastly pale, shrunk away a trifle and shuddered from head to feet.

Outside the door, the detective thought:

"The cat is out now! They know the truth, and I have not been forced to tell them."

Jaipur laughed.

"It can't be true! I will not believe it!" came hoarsely from Harold's lips. "It was not the same Milton Trench."

"It was Milton Trench, the half-brother of Warren Trench," asserted Dundal Wombo.

"Still I will not believe it! There is some dastardly trickery here!"

"It makes little difference now whether you believe it or not," said Jaipur.

Rana was speechless.

"My father could not have married in India!" cried Harold. "He would not have kept it a secret!"

"But he did marry, and kept it a secret so far as his people in this country were concerned," assured the Tiger Rajah. "I knew all his private affairs."

It was some time before Harold could realize the possibility that Rana was his own half-sister.

And she was also his wife!

When at last he understood it all, and began to believe it was true, he actually felt thankful that Dundal Wombo had found them and made them captives when he did.

"I am willing to die now!" was his thought. "I could never regard Rana as my sister! If I lived, it would be a life of misery."

It seemed that Jaipur understood what was passing in the mind of his captive, for he repeated:

"But I have something to tell you of your father, American, that may make your last moments anything but joyous."

"Tell it, if you wish. I fancy it is some lie concocted by your brain!"

"You are wrong. It is true."

"Tell it."

"Do you know how he died?"

"I never knew the particulars."

"He died suddenly."

"Yes."

"And mysteriously."

"So I have heard."

"He was murdered!"

"I have more than once suspected as much. Did you kill him?"

"No! no! no! Did I not tell you he was my friend? I would have given my life for him!"

"Then who did kill him?"

Jaipur smiled in a tantalizing manner.

"He was very rich."

"Well?"

"He was murdered because of that."

"And robbed?"

"Yes."

"Who did it?"

"A man who followed him from this

country—an enemy of his—a man with the treacherous blood of the whites coursing in his veins."

"Who? who? Speak his name, man!"
"You have an uncle who went to India."

"Yes."

"Your father's half-brother was your father's deadly enemy."

"You don't mean to say that—"

"I mean to say your father was murdered by his own half-brother!"

This was the second blow, and, although it was not as heavy as the first, it seemed to stupefy Harold Trench. He sat staring at Jaipur as if he had not understood the words.

"Perhaps you doubt," purred the Tiger.
"I could bring proof, if I chose; but I will not go to the trouble."

"It is true," said Rana, huskily.

Harold did not lift his eyes to hers, for he could not bear to look at her then.

"Yes, it is true," nodded Jaipur. "That is what brings me to this miserable land. I am here to destroy the man who killed Milton Trench, and I will succeed in the end."

"But he is already dead."

Dundal Wombo laughed.

"He is not dead, though he sought to make me believe as much."

"He must be dead! He was buried in Greenwood!"

"That is true."

"How do you explain that?"

"He studied the magic of India."

"Will that restore the dead to life?"

"It will when they die in a certain manner. With him he brought to this country Ongo Phal, a fakir. Ongo Phal knows the secret of dying as far as appearance goes and being restored to life at the end of a period."

"But Warren Trench was buried."

"That makes no difference. He remained in the ground less than three days; then he was taken up and restored to life by Ongo Phal."

"I can't believe it possible. A man could not stay in the ground three days and not be dead beyond recovery."

The Tiger made a scornful gesture.

"That is all you know about it. Ongo Phal was buried for the space of seven days once, and yet he still lives. You cannot understand the powers of the magicians of my country. I tell you Warren Trench, the murderer of Milton Trench, is alive and well. But his time is short, for Jaipur, the Tiger Rajah, has pronounced his doom! He has escaped me thus far, but I will succeed in reaching him before long!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

INTO THE CELLAR.

OUTSIDE the door the listening detective had heard enough to make clear the entire mystery of the most remarkable "case" he had ever tackled. He now thoroughly understood why Warren Trench had died in such a singular manner and why a detective was required to guard the corpse.

Jaipur had understood the attempted deception, and his chosen tools were watching an opportunity to thrust a knife into the supposed-to-be dead man. If that had been accomplished, all of Ongo Phal's magic would not have availed in restoring Warren Trench to life.

Prince now knew why Trench had such deadly and unrelenting enemies in the Stranglers, and he did not wonder the man who had murdered his own half-brother feared the Thugs who were after him as avengers.

Fire-Eye drew a breath of relief when all this was made clear, for he had not found a mystery without a solution, as it almost seemed at one time.

"Now, the sooner I can bring this affair to an end the better," was his mental comment. "If I only had a force of bluecoats here I'd mighty soon drop in on Mr. Dundal Wombo. As it is—"

Once more he hesitated, not able to decide on any absolute move. Deadly enemies though Jaipur and Warren Trench were, the detective did not exactly relish the idea of having Trench as an assistant in overcoming the Tiger Rajah. However, such aid was better than none, and he listened eagerly for some sound that would tell Ongo Phal.

succeeded in carrying word of what had happened.

As for Harold, the revelations had quite upset him for the time, and he sat pale and speechless in his chair.

Rana was his sister! That had seemed a cruel blow at first, but when he thought they were probably lost to each other forever, he felt himself much more able to bear it.

A sudden fancy came to him. If Warren Trench were not dead, where was he?

Ongo Phal was the name of the magician who had restored him to life after burial, and it was also the name of the snake-charmer who had rescued them from the cellar of Barret's Hotel.

The snake-charmer had declared himself a man of magic.

They were one and the same!

In that case, it must be the mysterious masked man was Warren Trench, and the woman was his wife!

Harold could now readily understand why the man had seemed so familiar to him.

All this flashed through his mind in a moment, for the brain often acts with marvelous rapidity.

The mystery was solved, but little good it could do the helpless captive in the hands of Dundal Wombo.

The only thing that remained to puzzle Harold was why Warren Trench should have befriended him in any way. Perhaps the man had sought in that manner to partly atone for the red crime with which his hands were stained.

Little did the captives dream that Fire-Eye, their most powerful friend, armed to the teeth, was just beyond the door and had heard the whole of Jaipur's revelation.

Had they known it, they might have taken courage.

The Tiger Rajah became weary of gloating over his victims.

"Why should we delay?" he cried. "Demon is hungry, and it is a pity to neglect the poor beast! We will go to the cellar at once, and he shall be properly fed. Rana, my dear, you shall witness him eat his meal. That is part of my punishment for you."

The girl could not have spoken had she tried. Her face was ashen in hue, and a great horror had settled in her eyes.

At this moment, Harold ventured to look at her, and his heart was wrung with anguish when he saw how much she suffered.

"Bear up, sweetheart—for you are still my sweetheart," he whispered.

Her eyes met his, and he saw in their depths all the mad longing of her soul—all the passionate rebellion against cruel fate. He knew she loved him still, not as a sister should love her brother, but as a wife should love the husband she has chosen before all the world.

"Was ever God so cruel before!" she sobbed, without shedding tears. "Can it be there is a God who will allow such a thing to be?"

"You speak of God—our God?"

"Yes, for my father taught me the folly of believing in the gods of the land in which we lived. He taught me to believe in the one All Wise Being who rules over all."

"You must not let your faith be shaken now, dearest."

"But how can an All Wise Being allow this creature Jaipur to accomplish his purpose?"

"The ways of Providence are past finding out."

"I would beg for your life—I would do anything if I thought it would do you any good."

"Do not think of it, Rana! It would do no good, and Jaipur's triumph would simply be more complete. Seal your lips."

"The hour is almost up," broke in the Tiger Rajah. "Are you prepared to meet your fate, American?"

"You shall see."

"Very good. I am going now to see that everything is ready for the feast. Make the most of the few remaining minutes you have to live."

Then he left the room by the door, one of the men following him, while the other was left to keep an eye on the captives, for Dundal Wombo had discovered Yankees were very slippery and hard to hold.

Eye had taken warning in time to

conceal himself as before, and he watched Jaipur and his servant descend to the cellar.

"Now is my time!" thought the detective, as he slipped back to the door.

"There is but one man left to guard the prisoners. I can down him and get them out of the house before Jaipur and the other can prevent."

But when he placed his hand on the knob of the door and cautiously turned it, he discovered the door was securely fastened.

The Tiger had taken precautions to prevent an escape or a rescue.

"What infernal luck!" softly grated Prince.

"What am I to do? I cannot beat down the door."

He lightly ran his hands over it and soon decided it was altogether too heavy and stout for such a thing.

"Oh, that Warren Trench and his men would come now! It might be a case of dog-eat dog, and I could find a chance to get Harold and Rana away while the deadly enemies were chewing each other up."

But Warren Trench was not at hand, and the daring ferret was forced to think of some other plan.

His brain acted swiftly, and it was not long before he decided to go down into the cellar where the culmination of the tragedy was soon to take place.

"Perhaps I may find some way to baffle them after they have taken the young man down there to feed him to the tiger. There is no chance for me to spread myself here, and I can take them by surprise in the cellar, for they will not dream of finding a foe there. And Warren Trench may come before Harold is cast to the tiger."

He hesitated no longer, but followed Jaipur down into the darkness of that underground tiger's den, feeling his way carefully along.

Prince had been there before, and so kept his bearings perfectly. Once or twice, however, he made enough noise that he feared the Tiger Rajah would hear it and become alarmed, but his fears were groundless.

The roaring of the caged tiger came to his ears, telling him Jaipur was in the part of the cellar where the creature was confined.

It was more than likely the heathen was tantalizing the beast in order to make it all the more fierce.

Fire-Eye did not venture through the passage, but waited until Jaipur and his attendant came back, knowing there was danger they would meet where it was so narrow the heathen could not pass without discovering the presence of a foe.

Pretty soon the tiger ceased to snarl, and then the detective heard the sound of voices approaching.

Dundal Wombo was returning.

Fire-Eye concealed himself, and waited, his position being such he could peer down the passage.

A light appeared, and then the man from the East came in view, the attendant holding a flaming torch for him to see.

Prince Bruce fingered his revolver, almost overcome by a strong temptation.

"Would it be murder?" he thought. "I could drop them both with a couple of shots! Great Scott! what a chance! But it is possible Jaipur does not really intend to throw Harold to the tiger. No, I will wait."

While he wavered in uncertainty, Dundal Wombo passed on, ascended the stairs, and the opportunity was gone.

"Let him go," muttered Fire-Eye, leaving his place of hiding. "He was nearer death at that moment than he dreamed. I may yet be forced to bore him before the night is much further advanced. Now, to the tiger's den!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

BATTLING IN THE DARK.

THROUGH the passage the detective felt his way, moving slowly and cautiously.

"The final struggle must come soon," was his thought. "If Trench does not turn up, I'll have to wade into the whole gang."

He reached the place where the tiger was confined, and he could hear the beast moving about restlessly. It scented the detective and began snarling and roaring.

"It is well he cannot get out," thought

Fire-Eye. "He is in a fearful rage now, and he would certainly tear things up generally."

He remembered a place at one side of the cellar where some of the wall had fallen down, the rocks being piled up until they afforded a good place for concealment.

"I will hide there," he muttered.

Carefully he felt his way round to the spot, hearing the tiger beating against the bars at the lower side of the cage.

Prince had not been in the cellar more than five minutes when he heard Dundal Wombo and the others approaching.

"Here they come!" was his mental exclamation, as he crouched behind the rocks, clutching his revolver.

Into the cellar came the men, and then the electric lights were turned on.

Harold and Rana had been brought along; but, to the dismay of the hidden detective, Jaipur was accompanied by five of his men, instead of two.

The tiger walked from one end of his place of concealment to another, lashing his tail and keeping his glowing eyes on the moving man.

"There is my pet!" cried Dundal Wombo, with a cruel laugh. "Look at him, American! He will soon tear you limb from limb!"

Harold was very pale, but his legs did not shake beneath him, and he kept his lips pressed tightly together.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the triumphant Rajah. "Fear has sealed your lips—it has struck you dumb!"

"That is a lie!" was the steady retort.

"So you can speak! All the better! We will soon hear you crying for mercy."

"Another lie!"

"Bah! You are trying to keep up your courage now, but it is failing you fast. Look at the tiger. I dare you look at him!"

The captive calmly regarded the beast, and it seemed that the creature understood what was to take place, for its eyes were fastened fixedly on the doomed man.

"Isn't he a beauty!" cried Jaipur. "And he is hungry—so hungry! He will quickly leap on you and tear you to pieces! That will be the vengeance of Jaipur, Christian dog!"

"You make a great deal of talk, but you seem to do very little," came scornfully from Harold's lips. "Go ahead with your sport and get it over."

"You fear your nerve will fail after all. You are in a hurry to die."

To this Harold made no retort, turning to say something to Rana, who was supported by two of the attendants.

Jaipur snarled:

"Up with him! Take him up the steps and cast him into the den!"

The young man was immediately dragged toward the foot of the stairs.

"Well," thought the hidden detective, "I believe the time has arrived for me to take a hand."

"Up with the Christian dog!" again commanded the Tiger Rajah.

"Stop!"

It was Fire-Eye's voice, and it rung through the cellar like a clap of thunder.

Exclamations of astonishment broke from the lips of the dusky-faced men, and they whirled toward the point from which the word had seemed to come.

There they saw Prince Bruce standing upright, the revolver glittering in his hands.

The amazement and consternation of Dundal Wombo and his men was worth witnessing. They were literally turned to stone for the time.

"I hold five lives in my hand," declared the detective, in an impressive manner.

"It is he—it is our friend!" almost shrieked Rana. "He is here—he will save us!"

"It is the thrice cursed detective!" grated the Tiger Rajah, showing his milky teeth.

"Yes, it is I," flung back the dauntless ferret. "I am here to spoil your sport."

"You shall not escape from this chamber—you shall die!"

"You shall die first, dog of a heathen! I hold your life in my hand here," half lifting the revolver.

Jaipur did not shrink. He showed his teeth again, this time in a snarl.

All the while, the detective was keeping a sharp eye on the other men, knowing some

of them might take a fancy to shoot at him suddenly.

The Tiger Rajah grew furious, as also did the beast in the cage. The latter roared madly and flung itself repeatedly against the bars, which quivered and rattled before the assault.

"Up with the captive!" howled Jaipur. "Take him up and cast him into the pit! Don't mind this Yankee cur! We'll attend to him after the tiger has had its feast!"

Again the men began dragging Harold up the steps.

"Stop!" thundered Fire-Eye. "If you do not stop, you are both dead men!"

That had no effect, and the detective suddenly pointed his revolver at Dundal Wombo.

"As true as there is a God, I will shoot you dead, if you do not order them to come back!" he said.

At this moment there was a commotion on the stairs. Harold, by a mighty effort, had broken the bonds that held his hands, and he sent the two men head over heels to the bottom.

Down the steps bounded the now thoroughly aroused and desperate young man, the blood leaping furiously in his veins and his face showing the mad determination that controlled his soul.

"Dogs! Dastardly wretches!" he shouted in a ringing tone. "My turn has come!"

A feeling of triumph shot through the detective.

"He is free!" thought Fire-Eye. "Now we will give them a merry time!"

"Fools!" snarled the Tiger Rajah, in English. "You have let him escape! Oh, you shall suffer for this!"

The thunderstruck men leaped up just as Harold came down upon them like a whirlwind.

Out shot the arms of the young fellow, working like piston-rods.

"Smack! smack! Over went the two servants of the heartless potentate.

The Tiger screamed forth something in his own language, and those who held Rana released her to leap at the self-liberated captive.

"Count me in!" half laughed Fire-Eye, as he sprung over the rocks with the idea of taking a hand.

Jaipur made a bound, and—

Snap! the electric lights were turned off, plunging the place in darkness.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the evil voice of the Tiger. "I have you now!"

"Don't be too sure of that!" returned the detective.

He made a calculation by the sound of Jaipur's voice and bounded toward the spot where he expected to encounter the yellow-faced wretch.

A moment later, two human beings were engaged in a desparate encounter in the darkness of the cellar.

It was Fire-Eye's hope to take the Rajah alive and uninjured, if possible.

The detective might have succeeded, but a call came from the lips of the Tiger—a call that was understood by his satellites.

Directly, the ferret found he had at least three foes with which to contend.

Where was Harold?

If Fire-Eye thought of calling to the young man for aid, he did not do so, for he was prevented by a noose that slipped around his throat.

Instantly Prince seemed to redouble his efforts, for he knew the result that was sure to follow the tightening of that deadly cord. In a few seconds his strength would leave him, his senses would fly, and then he would be helpless in the power of Dundal Wombo.

With one hand, Fire-Eye tried to tear the strangler's noose from his throat, while he kept his foes off with the other.

All at once, his feet were knocked from beneath him, and he went down heavily.

This proved to be the most fortunate thing that could have happened, for the cord was torn from the dusky hand that held it fast.

Before he made an attempt to arise, Fire-Eye freed himself of the death-noose.

Then he found he was held down by two or three squirming human beings who were trying to crush the strength and life out of his body.

Setting his teeth, the desperate detective made one grand effort.

Like straws, almost, the ferret's assailants were hurled to the right and left, and the unbeaten wonder regained his feet.

They were fighting in the dark, and Prince felt sure his foes would not dare use knives for fear of cutting each other.

In this he was right.

Cries of fury broke from the lips of the baffled black men, and they came leaping back to the attack.

"Come on!" grated Fire-Eye. "I am making it really very pleasant for you!"

Then he was struck on the head and sent staggering.

So infuriated was the detective that his eyes almost seemed to blaze in the darkness of that cellar.

There was something wonderful about the manner in which he found his foes, and planted his blows in a telling way.

"Down you go!" came through his teeth. "Walk right up and take your medicine! There's lots of it ready! Come on!"

And they did come on! Never in all his life had he found himself in such a furious battle. His nostrils were expanded, and he was like a veritable gladiator as he hurled them back.

All the while he was listening for the sound of Dundal Wombo's voice. He longed to reach the leader of them all and get a hand on his throat.

"All I ask is just one more opportunity!" thought Prince. "If I get it, the minutes of Jaipur's life will be few!"

But the Rajah kept still in a remarkable manner. Once or twice he uttered a word of command to his men, but he must have changed his position as soon as he spoke, for Fire-Eye's eager hands failed to find him.

For all of the fight he was making, the detective realized he was being slowly and surely pressed back to the cellar wall. He knew accidents might happen, and, although he were more than a match for his assailants, a stumble or another fall might turn fate against him.

"I've got to stop this falling back," was his thought. "Instead, I must drive them."

Then his iron hands clutched one of the slender and slippery servants of the Tiger Rajah. The man squirmed in a fierce attempt to break away.

"Steady!" came from the detective's lips. "I need you!"

The man was caught up from the ground, and then he went whirling around Fire-Eye's head.

With this human club, the ferret beat down his enemies and cleared the space about him.

He knew he had knocked over one or two of his foes, but he could not tell where they fell, nor if either was Jaipur.

Shrieks of terror came from the lips of the unfortunate wretch who was being used as a weapon.

These screams made the caged tiger furious, and he roared in a most appalling manner, flinging himself again and again at the iron bars that held him captive.

"If he were to break out, there would be Satan to pay here!" was the thought that flashed through the brain of the detective, as he flung his human weapon aside.

Then he listened.

From another part of the cellar, came the sound of a panting struggle.

"Harold!" he called.

No answer.

"Harold, are you there?"

Still no answer.

He heard the sound of heavy breathing—a rasping, strangling sound that froze his blood.

He knew the meaning of it.

The person breathing like that had the cord of the Stranglers about his throat!

"Hold out—hold hard!" thundered Fire-Eye. "I will be with you in a moment!"

Then came a smothered cry in Rana's voice—a cry that seemed to indicate she had torn a baffling hand from her mouth!

"Help! Save—"

That was all, and it was quite enough. Prince Bruce knew the situation was most desperate, and the delay of a moment might mean the loss of a human life.

Across the cellar bottom he plunged in the darkness, running slap into the bars of the tiger's cage.

He recoiled just in time to escape the beast.

The tiger heard him and sprung, striking out through the bars.

It was a close call, for the claws of the beast ripped open Fire-Eye's right coat-sleeve from shoulder to cuff.

For the moment, Prince was bewildered somewhat. The demands of the situation were such that he could not afford to be bewildered, and he regained his composure almost instantly.

The rasping breathing had grown remarkable faint, and he knew the end could not be far away unless he took a hand.

"Oh, for light! Had he been able to see, he would have given almost anything."

Forward he rushed, ready for anything he might encounter.

"Harold!"

Again he was not answer.

"Rana! Rana! If you could tell me where he is!"

It seemed that the struggle for life was renewed in one last mad effort.

That was enough to guide him.

He found the spot, and then—

A million rockets seemed to burst in his brain, while the whole universe tottered and reeled into space—dark, terrible, unlimited!

Fire-Eye lay helpless on the ground, and the death noose was still about the throat of Harold Trench!

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE TIGER LOOSE.

An instant later, the electric light was turned on in the cellar, and Jaipur, the triumphant, looked about.

He saw the motionless detective, and, just beyond, the body of Harold Trench, with one of the black men kneeling on it.

"Are they dead?" cried the Rajah.

The question was asked in his own language, and the man with the cord instantly returned:

"This one is about finished, master."

"He still lives?"

"He does—barely."

"Then remove that cord instantly and try to restore him to consciousness. I swore he should be fed alive to the Tiger, and I mean to keep my word."

The order was promptly obeyed.

In the mean time, Rana had been held helpless by one of the men, but she was now given the power of speech, as all danger from the dreaded detective seemed past.

She said not a word, but her eyes were fastened on the face of the one man she loved above all others, and she breathlessly awaited the signal of returning life and consciousness.

She knew not why she wished him restored to life, for it seemed the fate selected for him by Jaipur must now surely come; but it is possible the last spark of hope was not yet dead in her heart.

Jaipur stood looking down at the motionless form of the detective, who seemed like a corpse, so pale and ghastly were his features.

"I hope the Yankee devil is not dead!" exclaimed the heartless wretch. "It would be too quick and too easy. Oh, I have something for him! He has given me great trouble, but this is the last. Dog! How I hate the white-faced curs! When my work is complete, I will soon leave their miserable land. If I had the power to annihilate them all in a moment—well, there would be not one of them on the earth one moment from now!"

Never had he looked more like a beast than as he uttered these words, his thin lips drawn back from his milk-white teeth. There was something utterly fiendish about him.

Giving the body of the detective a kick, Dundal Wombo turned to watch the efforts of those who were trying to restore Harold Trench.

Gradually the most of the purple color left the young man's face, and he began to groan in a most pitiful manner.

Rana's drawn features showed the agony she endured—showed every groan cut her to the heart, like the sharp thrusts of a keen knife wielded by a strong hand.

But she could do nothing. She tried to

creep to him, but was yanked back in a most unceremonious manner by the very servant who had often fawned and cringed before her as if she were a queen.

At length, Harold opened his eyes, and the first face he saw was that of the stony-hearted Tiger Rajah. Jaipur smiled, but that smile was not pleasant to contemplate.

"You have given us a great deal of trouble, American," he said.

"Rana—where—"

Harold started up slightly, and something like a sob of relief came from his lips as he saw his sweetheart close by. Then his strength entirely left him, and he fell back, helpless.

"I ought to double your punishment," went on Jaipur; "but I don't know how I could do it. For that reason, I will be satisfied when I see the tiger make a comfortable meal off you."

Harold did not seem to hear this, he had turned his head and was looking eagerly about. A name came from his stiff lips:

"Fire-Eye—"

"Is here." The triumphant Rajah turned to point at the prostrate form of the detective, and discovered—

Fire-Eye was not there!

For one instant Jaipur was struck motionless and speechless with utter amazement, and then a fierce snarl of unutterable rage came from his lips.

"What has happened? Where is he?"

"Right here!"

The detective was agrin crouching behind the fallen rocks, and his revolver was clutch'd in his fingers.

"I am not dead—not by a long distance, Mr. Dundal Wombo," came steadily from the ferret's lips. "One of you beauties cracked me a pretty hard one on the nut, but it only sent my wits rambling for the time being. I am now on earth again, and I'm here with both feet."

Jaipur literally gnashed his teeth.

"Fool—fool that I was not to have you tied up securely!" he raved.

"Call yourself all the hard names you please, Dundal. It may be fun for you, and it doesn't hurt me a bit. In fact, I rather enjoy it."

"But you have not escaped! You are still in this cellar, and you can't get away!"

"I am not so very eager about getting away. What I am looking out for now is that you do not get away. If you try—Drop it, or eat bullets!"

Fire-Eye was fully on the alert, and his revolver covered the heart of the Tiger Rajah when that worthy attempted to move to the spot where he could again throw off the electric current and plunge the cellar into darkness. Jaipur's hand was extended to touch the lever when the stern command came from the lips of the ferret.

The yellow-skinned rascal ground out a smothered exclamation of rage, and his hand fell.

"What do you expect to do?" was his question. "You are in a trap, American."

"So you say."

"You should be able to see it."

"But I do not see it, you know, my dear Dundal. There is nothing the matter with my eyes, either."

"Well, you'll see it soon enough, Yankee cur!"

"That will do! As I told you, I have not the least objection in the world to your calling yourself as many pet names as you please, but I do object when you fling them in this direction—and I object hard."

"What if you do object? How can you help yourself?"

"Well, I may take a notion to stop your mouth with a pill from this little toy of mine."

"You would not dare."

"Why not?"

"My men would tear you limb from limb." The detective laughed scornfully.

"Your men would have a jolly sort of a time getting to me. I think I could stop the whole crowd and not half try. In fact, I am literally itching for some of them to make a move that will give me a reasonable excuse to commence operations. Just invite them to try a snap shot at me. I'll go you ten to one for any sum I can finish the gang before one of them can shoot, and they may all start together."

Prince Bruce was putting up a jolly game of bluff, and he was doing it in great shape.

In fact, he was simply talking to give Harold time to recover his breath and strength to a certain extent. He felt sure a struggle must come soon, but he wanted the young man in condition to take a hand and do his level best.

Harold seemed to understand this, and he made no move to draw the attention of his enemies toward him until he felt he was able to make something of a show in the struggle.

Jaipur also began to suspect the truth, for he suddenly whirled to his servants and cried:

"Tie that one—make him fast!"

They flung themselves on Harold instantly.

With one desperate outlay of strength, the young man got upon his feet, and then, for a moment, there was a fierce and terrible battle against odds.

Then he broke from them, caught up a heavy stone, and dashed up the steps that led to the opening at the top of the tiger's den. Half way up, he whirled with the stone poised above his head, ready to hurl it down upon those who should follow.

Up to this point the rage of the tiger had scarcely known any bounds, and the sharp battle brought about an unexpected and appalling result.

The sound of this struggle increased the fury of the caged beast to a fearful extent, Again Demon flung himself against the iron bars, uttering a horrible roar.

The bars bent—broke!

"The tiger! the tiger is loose!" shrieked one of the black men.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE TIGER'S END.

THE tiger was loose!

At the same moment the warning cry was uttered several men came rushing through the passage and broke into the cellar.

They were Warren Trench, Clincher Mike, Cockney Bob and Ongo Phal, the latter being in the lead.

The moment Ongo Phal saw Jaipur, he screamed forth some words in his own language and made a dash for the Rajah. They clutched and went to the floor in each other's grasp.

Over these men sprung the tiger, and, with one blow of its paw, it stretched Warren Trench on the ground.

Uttering screams of terror, Cockney Bob and Clincher Mike fled into the passage.

Jaipur's attendants were at their heels, and, roaring madly, the furious tiger pursued.

All this had taken place so swiftly that Fire-Eye had no time to do anything, had he contemplated making a move.

Rana had been dropped to the ground by those who held her, and Harold leaped down the steps, fell on his knees, and lifted her in his arms, crying:

"She is dead! she is dead!"

But she was not dead. For the first time in her life she had fainted.

Fire-Eye was quickly at the young man's side, and a knife in the detective's hands set the girl free.

"She is all right," he assured. "But the escaped tiger may return. If he does, you must try to protect your sister from him. I have a loaded revolver, and I shall make an attempt to shoot the creature."

"My sister?" groaned Harold, scarcely seeming to understand anything else. "So she is my sister! And I have married her!"

Neither of them noticed that Warren Trench, who had been struck down by the tiger, was lying close at hand, his eyes wide open and fastened upon them. But now he spoke:

"His sister? It cannot be! How is she his sister? Is he not the son of Milton Trench, my half-brother?"

"He is the son of the man you murdered in India," coldly returned the detective.

"That settles it," said Warren Trench, speaking quietly. "The girl is not related to him in any manner."

"How do you know this? Milton Trench was also her father."

"Milton Trench married her mother, but the girl is the fruit of a previous marriage

with an Englishman. There is not a drop of Yankee blood in her veins, though she was brought up as Milton Trench's own daughter."

"But Jaipur—he declared that Milton Trench was her father."

"That was one of my half-brother's secrets the Rajah did not know. He was mistaken."

"Do you know this?" cried Harold, wildly. "Will you swear to it?"

"I will swear to it, and there is no reason why I should lie to you at this moment, for I am sure I am dying. Look! The paw of the tiger crushed in my ribs and tore me here. It is a wound from which I cannot recover. Jaipur brought the beast to America to kill me, and it has accomplished the deed at last!"

At this moment a fearful uproar came through the passage. There were at least a dozen revolver-shots, followed by cries of triumph.

"They have killed the tiger," came faintly from the lips of Warren Trench; "but he did not die soon enough."

Then he looked around, calling for Jaipur.

In one corner of the cellar lay two forms clutched in each other's embrace. They were Ongo Phal and the Tiger Rajah!

Fire-Eye approached them, only to start back with a gasp of horror, for the hooded head of the deadly cobra was upreared above the motionless figures, and the serpent sent forth a warning hiss!

In the midst of the battle, the snake had bitten both its masters and his hated foe! They were already dead!

Cockney Bob and The Clincher had succeeded in shooting the escaped tiger to death, more by a fortunate chance than by any skill with their revolvers, as a bullet had pierced the terrible creature's brain.

Two of the fleeing Indians had been injured by the beast. The others escaped from the cellar, followed by Cockney Bob and The Clincher a few seconds later.

It was not very long before the detective, Harold and Rana left that part of the cellar where the dreaded tiger had been confined, but they did not do so until Warren Trench had breathed his last.

Rana's joy when she knew Harold was not truly her brother may be imagined.

London Bess, having received word from Bob and Mike, disappeared that very night, and the police assert she is not in this country.

Bob and Mike also attempted to get away, but they were "pinched" on grave charges, tried, convicted and sentenced.

Barret, the villainous hotel-keeper, also received his merited deserts. He is "doing time," having been brought to justice by the efforts of Fire-Eye.

Warren Trench's will left everything to Harold, his nephew, as it stated the property rightfully belonged to the son of Milton Trench.

Harold and Rana are happy as man and wife, and there is one ever welcome visitor to their home.

It is Fire Eye, the detective, who is still in harness, dreaded by evil-doers and honored by honest men.

THE END.

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